

"FO DE LAWD'S SAKE, MR. MAN, DOAN SHOOT!"
—(Chap. I.)

(Diverging Paths.)

THE DIVERGING PATHS

A Story of the Pioneer days of Missouri

BY
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Respectfully Dedicated

To

MY MOTHER.

*Just a plain, old-fashioned woman,
Mellow eyes of chestnut brown,
A wealth of wavy auburn hair,
A neat blue gingham gown,
A pleasant word for every one,
For me there was no other,
A loving sweetheart, tried and true,
She was my Mother.*

*All the boyish pranks of childhood
Were forgiven with a smile,
No thought of distant future
Did my happy heart beguile.
And after prayer at evening time,
A gentle, faithful lover,
Watched me drift to dreamland,
She was my Mother.*

*In darkest days of manhood's care,
Sunshine or stormy weather,
A loving heart to soothe the pain,
We whiled the hours together.
A kindly word to help me on,
No strife with one another,
A Christian heart to pray for me,
She was my Mother.*

*Now my heart is filled with sorrow,
And the dim and distant past,
Presents a picture to my vision,
O, could it forever last!
In the rugged path of life, I know,
A spirit 'round me hovers,
An Angel's gone to Heaven,
She was my Mother.*

INTRODUCTORY.

KIND READER:

It has long been our cherished ambition to be able to see and to know life as it really exists, but as each day passes away we find that the deceptive practices of humanity are driving us farther and farther from the goal.

Truly some author has said, "O Consistency, thou art a jewel," and as we are carried along day by day, step by step, as it were, we are brought to a better realization of the many little inconsistencies, not only of others, but in our own spiritual being.

In presenting this little volume for your perusal, it is not our intention to criticise the religious views of any one, nor to present anything antagonistic to the ecclesiastical form of spreading the doctrine of Jesus Christ, but rather to draw conclusions, and learn to know that all is not gold that glitters.

We firmly believe in the immortality of the soul, and that the teachings of a good man in a good place are bound to be productive of good results.

But who is the good man?

THE AUTHOR.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Into the Unknown	9
II.	"Anticipation"	20
III.	The Birth of the Twins	32
IV.	The Journey's End	41
V.	Primitive Society and Pastimes	49
VI.	The Death of 'Rastus	61
VII.	The Relentless Fringe of Suspi- cion	73
VIII.	The Escape	84
IX.	A Wanderer in the Wide, Wide World	96
X.	A Broken Promise	107
XI.	In the Ascendancy	118
XII.	The Way of the Transgressor Is Hard	129
XIII.	The Faithful Shall Be Rewarded	141
XIV.	"Likened Almost Unto the Prodigal Son"	154
XV.	"Does It Not Seem Strange, My Dear, Good Mother"	165
XVI.	"And the Greatest of These Is Charity"	176
XVII.	"The Wanderer's Return"	188
XVIII.	"A True Reformation"	199
XIX.	"Reunited at Last"	210

The Diverging Paths

CHAPTER I.

INTO THE UNKNOWN.

Away back yonder in the early days of the settlement of Louisiana, when the uplands were one vast tract of prairie grass and blue stem, interspersed with myriads of beautiful wild flowers, and the forest had hardly as yet felt the touch of the implement of the artisan in the advance of civilization; when the light of day and the darkness of night were spread alike upon the beauties of nature, and the shrubs and plants and trees were nurtured alike by nature's God; where, in daytime, the woodland rang with the sweet refrain of the oriole, perched high upon the overhanging branches of the giant oak or elm, or perhaps the song of the meadow lark sending forth the shrill beckoning call to his mate, or the chatter of the thrush as he flitted away among the low grass and underbrush.

And the night-time was made hideous by the long, moaning cry of the whippoorwill, the quick sharp bark of the coyote, or the reverberating scream of the panther as he went forth from his lair in quest of prey.

Even when this part of the world was uninhabited, save by the native red skin, and a few adventurous traders and trappers, scattered along the shores of the Big Muddy from Cahokia to Council Bluffs, came Johnson Brant from a palatial home in the Old Dominion, across the Blue Ridge Mountain, to lend a helping hand, and share the hardships and toil of the advance guard of the spread of civilization, and with him came his pretty young wife, leaving home and friends to follow the fortunes of the sturdy pioneer, who a few short weeks before had led her to the Altar and had made the solemn promise "To love, cherish and protect until death do us part."

The departure from the old home was made amidst the lusty shouts of "Good luck!" "God Speed!" from the neighbors and friends who had gathered to see them off, mingled with the long sad farewells of the old gray-headed fathers and mothers, as they sent their children westward in search of fame and fortune, perhaps never to return.

A heartrending scene, but one quite familiar in those early days, when almost every family had witnessed the departure of loved ones toward the land of the setting sun, forming, as it were, that great body of empire builders, whose heroic deeds and noble sacrifices were destined to transform the virgin soil lying west of the Mississippi River from the happy hunting grounds of the noble red men into one of the most productive farming communities the world has ever known.

An affecting farewell, yet those kind words of consolation and good wishes rang in their ears long

after, and were the means of buoying their young hearts, and urging them forward upon the long and perilous journey that was to follow.

The old servant, Rastus, who had been a member of the Brant family ever since Johnson could remember, was to ride with them to the river, a distance of some thirty-five miles, where they were to meet the packet boat on its long, perilous journey down the Ohio to Cairo. What little luggage they were to take was placed in the care of the old darkey.

It was springtime, and as they set out on their horses, Johnson leading, Mrs. Matilda next, with "Rastus" bringing up the rear, the gentle breeze and the freshness of the beautiful spring morning awakened their souls to the grandeur of life, and under the intoxicating influence of connubial happiness, the recent pangs of sorrow were almost forgotten.

Mile after mile was traversed in a short swinging canter, each patch of green wood through which they passed adding untold lustre to the beauties of the morning. Each twig was covered with rows of sparkling diamonds, and as the wet leaves were brushed aside, myriads of gems were spilled upon them. The air was alive with the sweet music from the throats of the innumerable species of birds, squirrels chattered, bees hummed, and through the denseness of the overhanging boughs, the sun showered its golden rays, its richest blessings upon them.

They arrived at the landing only a short time before the boat was to leave, and spent the interval in

getting acquainted with those of the party who had came aboard farther up and were to make the journey with them.

In those early days the river craft were rudely constructed affairs and could hardly be called boats, but they served the purpose and performed a very important part in the great move westward. They were in reality nothing more than rafts with a cabin for the accommodation of passengers and crew built on them, resembling the very ordinary river houseboat of to-day; they had no motive power and were used only in descending the stream, drifting along with the current.

As the time for their departure drew near, "Old Rastus," who had been very quiet and non-communicative since early morning, could withstay the flood which had been gradually welling in his bosom, no longer, with tears streaming down his face he grasped the hands of "My chilluns," as he was pleased to call them, and with the parting words of, "'By, Mars Johnson; 'by, Missy Matilda, I does hopes de good Lawd will keep yo' and bring yo' safely back home," the faithful old darkey turned and walked away, Brant and his wife tearfully gazing after the retreating form, the good Lord only knowing what thoughts were rapidly formulating in the mind of the old man.

As the sun was slowly sinking beneath the western horizon, casting a ruddy glow upon the bosom of old mother earth, foretelling, as it were, the rapid advance of the dying day, the little craft was cast loose from its moorings, and sent upon its errand, amidst the hearty cheers from the onlook-

ers on shore. Gliding out in midstream, it moved slowly away with the current toward the land of promise.

The little party aboard the boat now numbered fifteen souls, all told. Aside from Brant and his wife, there was Mr. and Mrs. Keys, with a family of four children, Tommy, then a lad of eleven, being the oldest, ranging then in step-like order down to Mary, the youngest, who was only three years of age; a little golden-haired miss, who, by her winning ways and sunny disposition, at once captured the heart of every one on board, and was the pet of them all during the remainder of the trip.

Jeremiah Sampson and his good wife Belinda, four boatmen and a gentlemanly and distinguished-looking individual, about middle age, with coal-black hair and keen, penetrating black eyes, who had started with the boat from Pittsburg, made up the rest of the crew.

In those days it required only four men to operate and steer the rude rafts then plying on the river, two working at night and two in the daytime, one man being stationed forward, the other aft, each armed with long poles to keep the boat from going aground and prevent it from colliding with other craft. The rules of navigation were not necessarily so strict then as they are to-day, and it was not an infrequent occurrence for the boatmen to be relieved at their stations by the willing hands of the men on board.

The evening was spent in telling stories and singing those old-time melodies of inter-colonial days, the rich soprano voice of Mrs. Brant blending in

perfect harmony with the deep bass voice of her husband and the rare tenor of the dark-eyed stranger, who, although being of a rather taciturn disposition, had been persuaded to take part in the festivities, Mr. Brant's wonderful tact for the telling of good stories coupled with his bright and cheery disposition, at once made him the leader of the little party, and he was then and there adorned with the sash of Captain, a gift which followed him to the grave.

As the hour grew late the merrymakers began to retire to the stuffy little rooms in the cabin to which each party had been assigned, the children first, next the ladies, then the gentlemen one by one, until every soul on board with the exception of the two boatmen and Johnson Brant, were wrapped in the gentle and ever-indulgent arms of Morpheus, sleeping that sweet sleep that can only come from the blessings of that rarest of all earthly treasures; Health and Vigor.

Time sped swiftly by, and still Captain Brant paced to and fro, from one end of the boat to the other, his mind fully absorbed with the many occurrences of the day just closed and wondering what the great and distant future had in store.

He soon tired of this means of dispensing with time, and went forward, gratuitously offering his services to the man on duty, which were readily accepted. He took charge of the guide poles and with a few parting instructions, the boatman retired to his bunk, with the promise that he would be called a short time before dawn, so that he could be on duty to turn over the station to the day man

in proper order. Thus Brant was left entirely alone in the solitude of the early summer night, to conquer the great tidal wave of homesickness which was already welling in his bosom, and to dream out his destiny.

The night was beautiful in the extreme. The full moon looked down from mid-heaven in splendor, casting its radiant arrows of brightness upon the smooth silvery surface of the peaceful river. A soft, gentle breeze was blowing from the southwest, lending life and comfort to the occasion, as it were, and the death-like stillness was only disturbed by the occasional splash of a light ripple, spending its force against the side of the boat, or the solitary hoot of the owl from the dense jungles which lined the banks of the stream on either side.

The hours dragged slowly by, Brant standing firmly at his post of duty, gazing intently ahead, his thoughts apparently lost in reverie. Some time during the early hours of the morning a slight noise from behind attracted his attention. He laid his guide polls aside and proceeded forthwith to investigate, but nothing out of the ordinary was found and he returned to his lonely vigil, thinking that the creaking noise came perhaps from the rough timbers of the raft.

Another half hour passed quietly, when again the peculiar noise broke the stillness of the night, much louder than before, sounding as if a very heavy body was falling down a flight of stairs, and coming, seemingly, from a pile of boxes and baggage of all kinds that had been stored forward. At home Brant had always been considered fearless,

but to-night his wonderful nerve had almost deserted him, due perhaps to the strange surroundings. His mind was filled with the unwelcome thought of the savage wild beasts of the forest, and of what he had read of the treachery and cunning of the Indian. His hair stood straight and his whole body trembled with fear. His first thought was to cry aloud for help, but his vocal organs failed to respond to the call. He seemed glued to the spot, his eyes were fixed straight ahead upon the huge bulk of luggage looming up in the darkness, apparently entirely overcome by fright. But only for a moment. He quickly regained his composure and drew himself together, fully determined to stand his ground, whether the cause of the mysterious disturbance be friend or foe.

He had advanced only a step when a huge, dark form appeared, which seemed to have arisen in a twinkling from the pile of plunder. The little duelling pistol which had been presented him by his father, and which he now carried at his side, was his first thought. He grasped it firmly in his right hand, and leveled it directly at the apparition or human being, whichever it might be. In a commanding voice he demanded to know who was there, and what was wanted. Quick as a flash the form disappeared behind the boxes. He advanced to a commanding position and peeked over, expecting at any moment to be compelled to engage in a struggle for life. A peculiar sight met his gaze. There, on the rough floor, his face turned heavenward, his eyeballs rolling, as if writhing in death agony, lay the prostrate form of Old Rastus, so

badly frightened that he did not even recognize his master. In a weak, trembling voice he at once began to plead for mercy.

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, Mr. Man, doan' shoot, I'se jest a poo' old no'-count niggah dat nevah——"

"Oh, please doan' p'int dat gun dis way, Mr. Man. Hones', I nevah did do nothin' wrong, 'ceptin' de time I stole de parson's chickens. Ef yo' jest lets me go dis once, Mr. Man, I promise for de good Lawd——"

From the fear of imminent danger of a few moments before Brant was now placed in a very ludicrous position. He could retain himself no longer, and burst out in a hearty laugh, whereupon the old darkey recognized him, jumped to his feet, and threw his arms about his neck in a very affectionate embrace.

"Bress de Lawd, Mars' Brant, I'se saved. I done thought dis niggah was a gonah fo' sho'r dat time."

While Brant was really pleased at the situation, and felt much safer with the faithful old servant near, he was forced to lead him to believe that he had incurred the very great displeasure of his master.

"What on earth are you doing here, 'Rastus'?"

"I sho'ly begs yo' pardon, Mars' Johnson, but I jest couldn't stay an' let yo' chilluns go alone 'mong dem bar's an' Injuns widout some one along to keep dem from eatin' yo' all up."

A very plausible story, inasmuch as the old darkey had given a splendid example of his utter disregard for danger only a few moments before.

"But," exclaimed Brant, "what disposition was

made of our horses at the landing, and what do you suppose the folks at home will think when they find that you have not returned?"

"Bress yo' life, honey, I'se done gone an' fix dat all up. I jest found dat no-'count niggah, Sam Griscom, up to de landin', an' he tole me he wants to get home pow'rful bad, so I done gib him de hoss's, an' he promise me fo' de Lawd dat he go straight home an' tell de old Marster dat yo' done want me to go 'long wid you. So heah I is."

"Very well, Rastus, your scheme has worked admirably, and I suppose we will be compelled to take you with us."

During the excitement incident to the discovery of the old darkey, and the conversation and explanations following, Brant had entirely forgotten everything else, time had slipped by very fast, and dawn was breaking before Brant came to a full realization of the fact that he had almost deserted his post of duty, perhaps imperiling the lives of all on board. He hurriedly awakened the sleeping boatman, and returned with him, barely in time to avert what might have been a fatal catastrophe. During his absence the boat had drifted toward the south bank of the stream, and was on the very point of going upon the jagged rocks protruding from the bluff. Quick work with the poles, however, prevented the trouble, and the boat was soon back in mid-stream, drifting peacefully along as before.

In the morning, quite a commotion was created on board by the appearance of the old colored man, but Brant soon set their minds at rest by telling the incidents leading up to the discovery of Rastus,

and the unearthly noise that he had made in an endeavor to extricate himself from his place of concealment among the baggage. The excitement was of short duration, and the little crew soon settled down to comparative quiet. Rastus was installed as a member of the little family once more, and was to act as Mrs. Matilda's bodyguard.

Nothing of importance transpired to mar the pleasure and quietude of the little party until late in the evening of the fourth day of their journey. A short time after passing the mouth of the little Kanawah, a violent storm, which had been rapidly forming in the south and west, burst with all its fury upon them. The great black clouds came rolling in, tumbling over each other pellmell, seemingly in a mad race to spend their relentless fury, then came rain, and with it, inky darkness. The heavens were rent asunder and the lightning's red glare cast its fiendish glow upon the little boat tossing about upon the billowy waves, sent adrift, and helpless, upon the great ocean of fate.

CHAPTER II.

"ANTICIPATION."

The dawning of another day, and with it came all the beauties of an early summer morning. The sun peeped from behind an embankment of dripping foliage, casting its radiant halo of light upon the four corners of the beautiful blue dome of heaven, the woodland rang with the piping refrain of sweet singing birds. The whole world seemed to have been awakened to the beauties of nature.

Hardly a trace of the violent storm of the preceding evening was discernible, not even a cloud to mar the beauties of the azure sky, and had it not been for the soft, wet grass and a few branches lying prone upon the ground, with an occasional shower from the overhanging boughs, the track of the storm king would have been entirely obliterated.

The little bark, although badly damaged, had weathered the storm in perfect safety. Captain Brant had proven himself a hero, and the mysterious dark-eyed stranger was ever at his side in the discharge of his dangerous duty, lending a helping hand when needed and offering kind words of comfort and consolation to the badly frightened women and children.

The task of lashing the boxes of supplies and baggage on board had hardly been completed when it became so dark from the blinding wind and rain that the entire crew was compelled to seek shelter in the cabin, leaving the boat unmanned, drifting aimlessly and carried along as a chip upon the ocean. At one moment it would seem as though the frail craft would surely founder, but the next would find it righted and hurrying along to almost sure destruction upon the banks of the stream. The last hope of deliverance had vanished and the little crew with one accord, knelt and offered up a fervent prayer to God, expecting momentarily to be dashed to a watery grave.

Just when the storm was at its height and the roaring wind had apparently attained its highest velocity, the boat gave a mighty lurch, then sailed off smoothly as if descending a gradual incline, but for one short moment only. It came to with a dreadful jerk, gave a violent shudder, then remained motionless. The shock was so severe and unexpected that the occupants of the little cabin were thrown violently to one side of the room, all in a heap upon the prostrate form of the brave Rastus, who at the very beginning of the storm had sought shelter in the cabin and had given himself up to a severe arraignment of his own weaknesses; condemning himself for the manner in which he had come aboard against the wishes of his master; criticizing very severely the ruse he had perpetrated, which he, at first, had thought very clever.

When the excitement occasioned by the jam had subsided to a certain degree and all on board were

accounted for, there was great rejoicing, inasmuch as not a single soul had been severely injured. Rastus had been entirely overcome by fright, but a plentiful supply of cold water used freely soon brought him around in good shape. When his eyes opened he stared into vacancy for a few moments, then gazed all around apparently in deep thought; Brant came forward and the old darkey, seeing his master, seemed to fully realize that all had gone well.

"Bress de good Lawd, Marse Johnson, I'se saved ag'in, an' I wants to tell yo' dat I hain't no fo'ty gallon Baptist no mo', from dis time on I'se a Meth'dist, sho'. I jest b'lieves a little sprinkle am good 'nough for dis niggah."

Towards morning the storm abated and the men ventured forth to find their boat firmly wedged between the roots of two giant willows, lying high and dry. As soon as it became light enough to see, they were rewarded with one of the grandest sights they had thus far witnessed. Providence had smiled upon them, and the little bark had been carried by the wind into a beautiful cove on the outskirts of what was afterwards found to be a thickly wooded isle. The underbrush had been cleared away, and the ground underneath the giant trees was covered with a luxuriant coat of blue grass, coming full to the water's edge. Nearby a tiny skiff hung idly at the end of a rope tied to a tree on shore; a gravel path led from the cove up the incline until lost among the trees, and a sleek-coated cow was lazily browsing on the hillside, all bearing the as-

sure evidence that this spot of the world was inhabited, but by whom? Was it friend or foe?

Being only human, their curiosity was naturally aroused, but they had no time for investigation. The men at once set about the task of repairing the boat, and devising means whereby it could be extricated from its very peculiar position. They worked unceasingly, and before noon all necessary repairs had been made and the raft floated, ready for the continuation of their journey.

The natural lawn offered a very inviting place to spend a few idle hours, and they decided to eat dinner (the first meal since the day before) and rest awhile upon the great beds of green grass.

The children scampered about, enjoying the scene immensely, and the men lounged around, smoking and talking of the miraculous escape of the evening before, while the women were busily engaged preparing the meal.

The idle curiosity of Rastus had led him on what he afterwards called "A distensive tower of suspicion," he had in reality only wandered a short distance from the camp, and none of the party had noticed the absence of one of their number. At the moment when dinner was ready to be served, the entire party were brought to their feet in alarm by an unearthly scream coming from the dense forest farther up the hill. All eyes were turned in the direction from which the sound had come, only to behold Rastus come tearing down the hill at break-neck speed, nearly frightened to death. He was bumping into the trees, nearly killing himself in his

mad flight, his eyeballs protruded from their sockets, his coat tail was standing straight out behind, his kinky hair was standing almost on end, and every step he would let out a scream that would strike terror to the hearts of the bravest. When near the stream he turned his head in the direction of the party on shore, just in time to trip over a limb that had been torn from one of the trees during the storm of the night before, and went tumbling headlong into the water. He soon scrambled to his feet, however, and managed to get aboard the boat, nor did he stop until he was safely behind the rudely constructed door of the little cabin.

At this moment a large Newfoundland dog trotted gently up to the crowd on shore, presumably the innocent cause of the old negro's fright, wagging his tail and showing by his actions that he wanted to make friends. The children were delighted at sight of the gentle canine. While they were patting his head and gently stroking his long, silky coat of hair, a childish voice calling, "Hea, Rover! Hea, Rover!" attracted their attention. A little blue-eyed, golden-haired lassie of perhaps eight years, had appeared upon the scene, evidently in search of the dog. Immediately the soft, gentle voice of a woman was carried upon the air to their ever-ready ears, calling:

"Theresa, oh, Theresa! Where are you, dear?" A few moments later a beautifully gowned lady came into the clearing. At first sight of the boat and the visitors standing about on the grass she seemed greatly excited. She readily perceived, however, that the little party were friends, and soon

regained her composure. Brant advanced and greeted her in his very courtliest manner with the usual salutation :

"Good morning, my good lady! How goes it with thee this beautiful morning?"

"Quite well, I thank you," came the pleasant response.

"I sincerely hope that we are not intruding upon your domain?"

"Not in the least, I beg to assure you; but, pray tell me, how you came to anchor in our little cove?"

"We had the misfortune to be upon the river last evening during the violent storm that passed this way, but fortunately fate smiled upon us, and we were carried in the track of the wind to this haven of safety."

"You should indeed feel thankful for your deliverance, for it was the most violent storm I have witnessed during my stay upon the island."

"Then we are upon an island? And in the Ohio River, too?"

"Yes; Blennerhassett. The island we call 'Beautiful.' I am Mrs. Blennerhassett, and the little girl is our only child. A short distance in the interior we have a very beautiful home. Won't you come with me and rest awhile at the cottage? I feel sure that every one of you would enjoy a little recreation after the harrowing experiences of that dreadful night. I know my husband would be glad to have you, so you must not refuse."

During all this time, no thought had been given to Rastus, who was beside himself with fear, and safely ensconced beneath one of the improvised beds in the

cabin. The excitement was gradually wearing away, and he ventured to the door and peeked out just as the party were making preparations to go with Mrs. Blennerhassett to her home.

"Mars' Brant, Mars' Brant, did yo' done cotched dat b'ar?"

"What on earth are you talking about, Rastus? We have seen nothing of a bear."

"Yo' sho', Marse Brant, dat you's alive?"

"Why, certainly. Why do you ask such a foolish question?"

"'Cause I done tho't dat b'ar eat yo' all up."

"Nonsense, Rastus. There has been no bear here. Come on out. You are only working upon your imagination."

"Look heah, Mars' Brant, I'se done lived a long time, an' fo' sho' dat was de wooliest imag'nation dis niggah evah did see."

"You are only frightened, Rastus. I am beginning to believe that you are sorely afflicted with a bad case of pusillanimity."

"I s'pose dat's right, Mars' Brant, whatever it am."

The innocent cause of Rastus' trouble at this moment came trotting up to Brant, and the old darkey very readily perceived his mistake. A sickly grin came over his face, and he walked slowly out on deck, looking very sheepish.

"Well, hones' t' goodness, dat am de mostest b'arish-looking dog I evah see in all my bo'n days."

The ladies of the party, Jeremiah Sampson, Mr. Keys, Mr. Brant and the children, accepted the hospitality of Mrs. Blennerhassett for the afternoon,

leaving Rastus and the boatmen to look after the supplies, and spend the interval as they most desired.

When they were ushered into the spacious sitting room of the Blennerhassett home, they were perfectly amazed at its grandeur. Costly rugs were upon the floor, and the rarest of oil paintings adorned the walls. The mahogany centerpiece was covered with the choicest books, and in one corner of the room, an old-fashioned square piano, with quite a number of pieces of sheet music strewn about, evidenced the fact that the lady of the house possessed a rare degree of culture and refinement.

The dark-eyed stranger had evidently preceded them to the mansion, for at that moment he and a large, powerfully built, pleasant-looking gentleman came walking in. Mrs. Blennerhassett presented her husband in her courtliest manner, at the same time explaining how the visitors had been shipwrecked on the island during the storm of the preceding evening. During the conversation the mysterious stranger had retreated to another part of the building, apparently making himself at home.

Brant was a very close observer, and he thought he had detected certain signs of recognition passing between Mrs. Brant and the man. His curiosity was thoroughly aroused, but he refrained from saying anything about it at the time.

Herman Blennerhassett was a man of wonderful physique, and a most courteous and pleasant disposition. He seemed at peace with all the world, and took especial delight in extolling the merits of his wonderful island.

"You see, it is this way," he explained. "I am an Irishman by birth, but grew tired of the Monarchical form of government of my native land, disposed of my estates, and came with my ALL to America. An exile from Erin, as it were, seeking a home in the land of the free. I came West, drifted down the Ohio until I came to this beautiful spot, and here, as you can see, I have spent the greater portion of my fortune, upon this island in the wilds of America. But we are perfectly happy and contented, my wife, and I, and feel amply repaid for the efforts and money we have spent upon 'The Island Beautiful,' where we expect to spend the remainder of our days."

A very pleasant afternoon was spent strolling about over the island with the Blennerhassetts as guides, viewing the many beauties of nature, truly some of the masterpieces of the handiwork of God.

Late in the evening the little party returned to the cove, and after bidding their most gracious host and hostess goodby, went aboard the boat. The boatmen pushed out in deep water and ere darkness settled, the little packet was again upon its way, gliding smoothly along with the current.

The journey had hardly been resumed when the discovery was made that one of their number was missing. The man who had worked so diligently for their safety, shoulder to shoulder with Captain Brant during the trying hours of the preceding evening, was nowhere to be found. From the proceedings which Brant had witnessed in the Blennerhassett home earlier in the day, he did not in the least fear for the safety of our man of mystery, as he

fully believed that his stay upon the island had been intentional. But the remainder of the crew were terribly wrought up over the disappearance, nor were they to be quieted until Captain Brant had presented his version of the whole affair. Suffice it to say, that the air of mystery surrounding the apparently premeditated stay upon the island offered abundance of food for thought for many long days thereafter.

The little band settled down to peace and quiet once more, the incidents of the preceding day being only vivid blurs upon the great pages of memory. Time went swiftly by; the hours grew into days and the days into weeks, and still the little boat went gliding along on the smooth silvery surface of the dreamy Ohio.

One afternoon, when all was going well on board, the ladies in the cabin and the men lounging aft, smoking and talking of future prospects, they were rudely awakened from their reverie by the loud cries of Rastus, who came running from the forward end of the boat, yelling at the top of his voice:

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, Missa Matilda, dat whole bunch ob keys am done gone an' fall ovahbo'rd!"

Brant instantly grasped the situation. He sprang to the rear end of the boat just in time to see a little form sink beneath the waves. It was little Mary Keys, who had ventured too near the edge of the raft and fallen overboard. Brant at once plunged into the water and seized the child in his strong arm, coming to the surface just in time to grasp the trailing end of the long pole used by the

boatmen in steering the craft. The man at once realized the situation. He began pulling the pole in, and almost before the remainder of the crew had regained their wits, Brant and the child were safely on board.

With tears streaming down her face, Mrs. Keys poured out the deep gratitude of a mother's love at the feet of Captain Brant, thanking him again and again for the wonderful heroism displayed in saving the life of her little daughter, but Brant treated the matter as an incident likely to happen during the life of any one, saying, "It was only what I would ask any man to do for me under like circumstances. It is a plain duty we owe to our fellow man."

Short stops were made at the little settlements of Cincinnati and Louisville, where their craft fell in with a flotilla of keel and flat boats, bound for points along the Mississippi, some going to St. Louis and some on down the river to New Orleans.

A week later they arrived at Cairo, where the boatmen were discharged, after being amply reimbursed for their faithful service on the long journey.

They were delayed several days at the settlement, but finally secured passage for the entire party on a keel boat going up the river, bound for St. Louis, the capital and metropolis of the province of upper Louisiana.

Late one afternoon in the latter part of August, 1806, the little keel boat tied up at the levee at the foot of Market Street, and our band of pioneers,

with their baggage (their only earthly belongings) were sent ashore.

They were strangers in a strange land, and did not know whither to go. Night was rapidly coming on, and they collected their baggage as best they could, preparing to spend their first night in this wonderful land of promise, on the banks of the mighty father of waters, sheltered only by the star-bedecked canopy of heaven.

CHAPTER III.

THE BIRTH OF THE TWINS.

The little village which had been founded by Pierre Laclède in 1764, and named St. Louis in honor of Louis XV, King of France, had at this time a motley population of about fifteen hundred souls, consisting principally of French, Spanish and Creoles, but was rapidly being increased by the influx of pioneers from the colonies. General James Wilkinson was Governor of the province of upper Louisiana, having been appointed from the army by President Jefferson, and history confirms the oft-repeated statement that he was one of the most disgraceful characters that ever donned an army uniform or held an office of trust within the gift of the President. He proved unscrupulous in the extreme, and was at this very time secretly in league with Aaron Burr in the planning of that damnable conspiracy against the government of the United States.

The good old French priest, Father Ribalt, who twenty-five years before had spent his fortune in financing the campaign of General George Rogers Clark against the British and Indians, and for the purchase of ammunition and supplies for the small

garrisons at Vincennes, Cahokia and his home settlement, Kaskaskia, had removed to St. Louis, and was now growing old and decrepit, yet he was the predominating spirit and his influence was felt everywhere among his parishioners. His life was made up of good deeds, and he was yet to be found in the front ranks, fighting for those principles which are the embodiment of all that is good in mankind. No service was too menial for him to undertake, if in his opinion, it was a worldly or spiritual consolation to those to whom it was rendered. He stood at all times ready to sacrifice his own life if necessary in the cause which he believed right. Not a soul within the confines of his parish but loved and revered him; all alike worshiped the name of Father Ribalt.

Each morning, unless the weather was too severe, it was his custom to visit the sick, if any, and to extend consolation and spiritual advice to those sorely afflicted, either in mind or body.

The morning after our little party had landed from the keel boat, the good old father, in his walk, came upon them as they were eating a hastily prepared breakfast. Noticing that they were strangers, he advanced and very courteously addressed them in broken English kindly offering his services if needed in any way: "I am Father Ribalt, only a lowly Shepherd of the Lord, attending this little flock in the wilds of America," he explained.

At the mention of the name Ribalt, Brant's heart gave a leap, for he had often heard it used in connection with the history of daring deeds of General Clark and his sturdy band of pioneer soldiers who

had made the wonderful march to the relief of Vincennes.

"Dear friend," exclaimed Brant, "we have often read of your many good deeds and noble sacrifices, and feel that Providence has indeed been kind to place us in the hands of one whom we know we can trust. We are immigrants in search of homes in the new territory, and it is our intention to push on farther westward as soon as the necessary arrangements can be made."

"But you are not going on now?"

"Yes; we have just held a consultation and decided to go on at once."

"I pray you heed the advice of one who has witnessed many hardships and privations in the up-building of this great country. Do not go on now. The season is growing late and cold weather would overtake you before the journey could possibly be completed. Spend the winter here, and make the start again when spring opens up. If you will permit, I will gladly assist you in securing a suitable shelter for the winter."

The little party with one accord voiced the sentiment of the good old father, and readily accepted his advice. That very day the men folk set about preparing quarters for their accommodation during the winter, and ere another week had gone by the entire company were installed in temporary homes.

The September following the advent of Captain Brant and his little band of followers into the territory, witnessed the return to St. Louis of Captain William Clark and Merriweather Lewis, with the company of daring adventurers who had followed

them during their two years of exploration through the land of the Mandan's and the Sioux. They had traced the Missouri River to its source, crossed the Rockies and descended the Columbia to Astoria, returning from their six-thousand-mile journey with the loss of but a single life, and a glowing description of their vast field of exploration, which in after years was destined to play a very important part in the making of United States history.

A very amusing incident happened in the Brant home in the afternoon of the day on which the explorers returned. The governor of the province had declared a holiday, and the heavy guns from the fort fired salute after salute in honor of the occasion. Rastus, whose only duty since their arrival had been to wait upon Mrs. Matilda and to look after the children in the Keys family, was on this particular day out in the woods with Tommy Keys, "Fightin' yaller jackets," as Tommy afterwards explained. Hearing the heavy canonading from the fort, the old darkey at once became very badly excited, and started for home as fast as his legs could carry him, Tommy, in the excitement following closely at his heels. When near the cabin they espied a small party of Indians, perhaps three or four, going in the direction of the village. Then they did fly, nor did they halt until they fell prostrate upon the floor at the feet of Mrs. Brant. She was of course frightened, and at once made inquiry as to the cause of the excitement.

"Fo' de Lawd, Missa Matilda, we'se goin' to hab wah fo' suah, doan' yo' heah dem guns shootin', an' I jest saw 'bout a million injuns comin' dis way.

Yes, sah, I done seen red in de milky way las' night, and I knowed fo' sho' dar was gwine to be trouble. I knows dis niggah am a gonah dis time."

At this moment Brant came leisurely walking in, only to find the house in a terrible uproar. He was greatly surprised, and at once demanded an explanation.

Mrs. Brant was still greatly excited, but managed to acquaint him with the story told by Rastus, whereupon he burst into a hearty laughter.

"W'y, my dear, the guns from the fort are being fired in honor of Captains Clark and Lewis, who, with their followers, have just returned from a tour of exploration begun over two years ago."

"But where are the Indians of which Rastus speaks?"

"They are only a friendly little party come to barter with the settlers."

At this explanation the excitement rapidly subsided, and Rastus finding that he was safe, took on an apparent air of bravado.

"I tells yo', Marse Brant, I had jest 'bout made up my mind dat if any ob dem Injun debils come pesticatin' 'round heah, I was gwine to lick de whole bunch, fo' I'se sho' a bad niggah when I gits riled."

The winter of 1806 and '07 passed very quietly. The men were almost constantly at work, preparing for the advancement through the forest when spring came again. Ox carts were procured and the rude implements used in those days for tilling the soil were purchased and stored away for future use.

Late in January came the startling news of the capture, near Natchez, Mississipp, of the flotilla un-

der command of Aaron Burr, as he was proceeding down the river, preparatory to the consummation of that dastardly plot which had originated in his fertile brain. The crew surrendered without resistance, but the chief conspirator succeeded in making his escape into the land of the "Seminoles."

This capture laid bare the whole plot, and led to the exposure of all of those who had in any way participated in the conspiracy, among them being General Wilkinson and "Herman Blennerhasset," who were "Stool Pigeons," as it were, controlled by the master mind of Burr; ending ingloriously one of the most daring and spectacular, yet least effective, intrigues the new world had ever known.

Even in those early days the news of the conspiracy being unearthed, spread like wildfire, and as the little threads in the life of Burr were closely woven together, his true life and character was brought to light, and it was thus that the little party of immigrants gained the first intimation of the identity of the mysterious stranger who had accompanied them the preceding spring as far down the river as the home of Blennerhasset. The man who had been so kind and courteous to all and had rendered such valuable service upon the night of that dreadful storm which had overtaken them in the early stages of their journey, was in reality Aaron Burr, the one-time Vice-President of the United States, having only missed being elected to the most exalted position within the gift of the people by the narrow margin of one vote; the man who in 1804 had met his old-time rival upon the field of honor at Weehawken, N. J., and avenged what he

thought to be the wrongs that had been inflicted upon him for the past quarter of a century; the man who in his younger days had brought the queens of New York society to his shrine by his wonderful powers of magnetism and those remarkable eyes, whose fire and charm none could effectually withstand; the man whose wonderful powers of duplicity had enlisted the aid of Blennerhassett, Wilkinson, at that time commander-in-chief of the army of the United States, and many other prominent men, in the forming of his scheme for disunion.

Yet, after all these years have gone, we are bound to admit, withal, that Aaron Burr was a wonderful character; his was only the story of the fall of a great man. No doubt calumny had been heaped upon his shoulders, and he only made his mistake in seeking revenge upon the whole people for the wrongs of his enemies.

Shortly after Burr's miraculous escape at Natchez he was captured and taken to Washington, where he was arraigned before the tribunal of justice on a charge of high treason. Burr conducted his own defense, and was acquitted on a technicality. He afterward returned to New York and engaged in his profession, and lived to a ripe old age, dying in wretched poverty, thus bringing to a termination the life of a wonderful man, who was perhaps "more sinned against than sinning," and who had played the game to the fullest extent, upon the great checker board of FATE.

For some time Mrs. Brant had been in a very delicate condition and on February 2d gave birth

to a pair of bouncing baby boys, the most important event thus far in the lives of Johnson and Matilda Brant. When the wretched pangs of childbirth had fully passed she seemed to realize as if for the first time the importance of her being. The real joys of motherhood had dawned upon her. She would clasp the chubby little forms to her bosom with words of endearment and shower kisses upon them.

As usual the neighbors and friends were very kind, the ladies of the party especially lending every assistance possible, each showering praises upon the first born, filling the mother's heart with ecstasy and delight.

"They are the very picture of their father," thought Mrs. Keys, while Mrs. Sampson persistently clung to the idea that one resembled its father while the other possessed all of the finer qualities of the proud mother. As is the custom with women folk upon an occasion of this kind, all disagreeing, none knowing.

Rastus had been informed in a roundabout way of the presence of a newcomer in the Brant home, but had not as yet been made acquainted with the news of the twins. Upon being ushered into the room of Mrs. Brant for the first time since the birth of the babies, his joy apparently knew no bounds. A little form was gently uncovered and he began at once, in his own peculiar way, to shower praises upon it, following the example of the ladies.

"I tells you', Missa Matilda, dat boy am goin' to be a soljer sho', he am de berry picture ob ole Marse Brant, an'——" At this moment the other sleeping form was uncovered, the first intimation to

Rastus that there was more than one. He was perfectly amazed.

"Fo' de good Lawd, how many hab yo' got, Missa Matilda, I jest likes to know?"

"Only two, Rastus. Twin boys. Don't you think they are real cute?"

"Dey's pow'rful fine babies, Missa Matilda. Dis am sho' a great country fo' raisin' soljers."

"I thank you, Rastus, for your words of kindness. My only hope is that they may both grow to be useful and respectable citizens."

Thus, in the little settlement beside the great Father of Waters, was brought into the light of day two souls whose pathways through life were destined to lead in far different directions.

CHAPTER IV.

THE JOURNEY'S END.

In those days there were comparatively few roads west of the Mississippi; merely faint bridle paths following ancient Indian trails through dense woods or across the broad expanse of prairie land, yet thither came the hardy pioneer, forming that great band of humanitarians who, looking to the starry heavens at night and the eternal and unobscured sun of the day, founded the civilization, which, seasoned in the fierce furnace of Indian warfare and conquest and tempered by the wonder-working finger of time, moulded this great country into a compact body of States and Territories, governed by the grand system of law, order and progress, of the present century.

When spring came again the little band of pioneers who had spent the long, tiresome winter in St. Louis, began making hasty preparations for the final lap of their journey. The farming utensils which had been stored away the preceding fall were brought from their hiding places and loaded on the ox carts; a plentiful supply of provisions and seeds for planting were procured and stored away among the baggage. Aside from enough oxen to serve

their purpose, a few ponies and some milch cows made up the equipment.

Under the pure, invigorating ozone of the sparsely inhabited country, the twins had waxed strong and hearty, and the Brants deemed it advisable to have them christened before their departure.

The good Father Ribalt, who had been their spiritual advisor, and a great source of comfort during the long winter days just passed, although not of their religious belief nor of their nationality, had gladly consented to officiate, and suggested the names of IVAN and IRVING, names which met with the hearty approval of the proud parents. The little fellows were henceforth known by this cognomen.

As usual, Rastus was not at all pleased with the proceedings. He had been permitted to attend the ceremonies, but was very much put out because the names he had selected were not used. From the very first he had contended that the boys should be called SAMUEL and SOLOMON, names which did not strike the fancy of the Brant family at all, consequently the wishes of Rastus in the matter were utterly ignored.

"Dat am all right dis time," he exclaimed; "but dis niggah am sho' gwine to hab som'thin' to say 'bout namin' de next bunch."

He seemed to think it a foregone conclusion that all children born to the Brant household from thenceforth would be twins, inasmuch as the precedent had already been established.

The morning following the christening found

everybody astir bright and early, ready for the start. Mrs. Brant, with the babies, was bundled on one of the ox carts and headed the odd-looking little caravan, while Rastus and the older of the Keys children, with the ponies and cattle, brought up the rear.

Many friends had been made during their short stay at the settlement, foremost among them being Father Ribalt, who was on hand to see them off. As he bade them goodby, perhaps forever, he could not withstay the great flood of emotion which had been rapidly welling in his bosom.

"You go," he said, "into the land of freedom and promise, away from the demoralizing sins and practices of congested humanity, as some have already done, to build homes for future generations. Ere another decade this vast country will have undergone a complete change; the red men of the forest will be pushed farther and farther toward the land of the setting sun by the speedy advance of progress and civilization; these broad acres will be completely under the subjugation of the horny hand of toil; magnificent church edifices will be erected, school houses will be builded, pretty farm homes will have taken the place of the Indian tepee, and bright-faced boys and girls will romp over the land where once the gaudily painted Indian warrior performed the fanatical ghost dance in all its wearied and fantismal forms. Mark my words: This will all come true. I am now in the decline of life, and have but a few short years to live, at best. I may not see this prophecy fulfilled, but there be some among you who will live to see and to know.

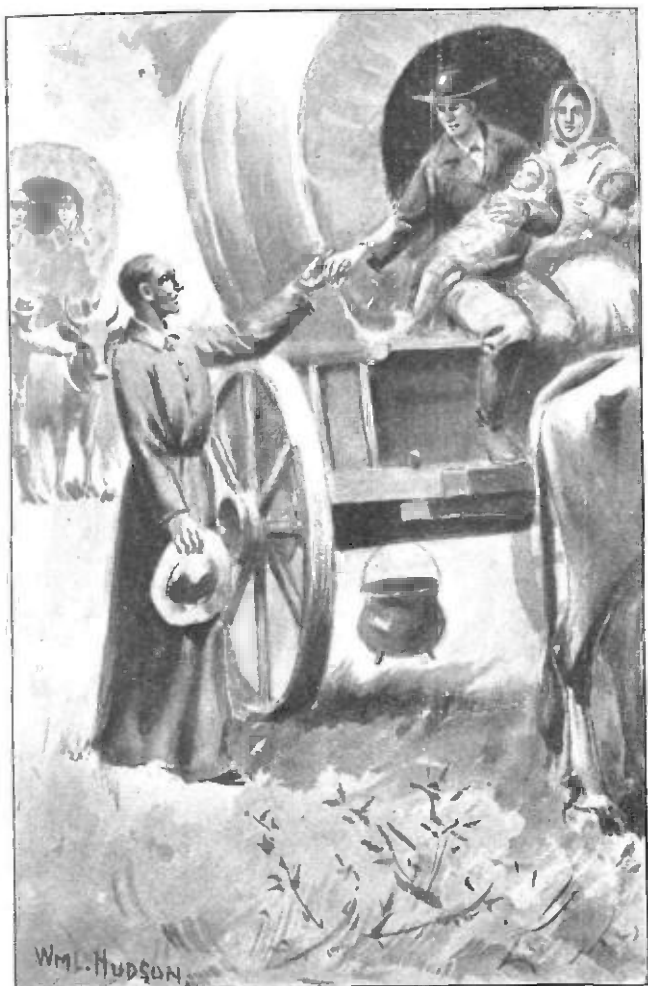
"May the kind hand of Providence be ever with you, my friends. Goodby." And he was gone.

As the aged form disappeared in the direction of the village, the odd-looking procession moved slowly away into the unknown, bearing that precious burden of souls whose tear-stained faces evidenced their great love for him who had recently gone from their sight, but whose countless number of good deeds would dwell freshly upon the pages of memory forever.

Not one in the party but felt that they were better men and women by having been brought in contact with the great and good man whose every act adown the pathway of life bespoke for him a *true Christian soul*; a man not of great learning, but of kindly deeds, whose sermons were portrayed, not in words alone, but in kindly ministrations and human benefaction toward all mankind.

Everything went well with the party, and two days after leaving St. Louis they arrived safely at the little Creole settlement of St. Charles, where they remained for only a day, then pushed boldly into the interior. They were now on the very outskirts of civilization and the paths through the forest were becoming dimmer and dimmer; progress was necessarily very slow, and the first night out found them only a few miles from the settlement. The sun was just disappearing beneath the Western horizon when they came to a halt by the side of a beautiful stream, whose grass covered banks offered an inviting place for a camp.

During the afternoon one of the oxen drawing the cart in which Mrs. Brant and the babies were



"MAY THE KIND HAND OF PROVIDENCE BE EVER WITH
YOU, MY FRIENDS! GOODBYE."—(Chap. IV.)

(Diverging Paths.)

riding, had become quite lame from some mysterious cause, and the entire evening was spent in an endeavor to relieve the trouble, but when morning came again the poor animal was in a worse condition than on the previous evening. They were in quite a dilemma. It would be impossible to proceed without it, and the injury would likely necessitate their staying at this place for an indefinite period, hence they at once set about constructing a rude shelter, preparing to make the best of the delay.

Early in the day, Rastus, who had been very quiet on the subject of the crippled oxen, was pleased to advance his theory of the mysterious manner in which the animal had been injured.

"I specs', Marse Brant, dat ole bull am done gone an' got stung."

"Very likely," exclaimed Brant, all the while gazing intently at the old negro. "And present indications point to the fact of its having been done by a large two-legged black bee."

He was a wonderful student of human nature, and had long since learned to believe that the old fellow could not withhold a secret for any great length of time.

Guilt showed very plainly on the darkey's shiny countenance and in his actions.

"Rastus, how did all this happen? Come, tell me the truth."

The old fellow at once began a rambling explanation of how he had thrown a club at a measly-looking cur that had been prowling about the cart, but his aim had been very poor, and the club intended for the canine had glanced off of the wheel, striking

the poor dumb brute on the shin. A very plausible story, and one which Brant really believed, but the real truth of the affair did not reach his ears until many long years after.

The country around the camp abounded in small game, and when the men returned at noon from a short tour of exploration, they brought with them an abundance of wild meat. During their absence the children, with the aid of Rastus, had manufactured a rather improvised fishing tackle from an old tow string and an ordinary pin, which had served their purpose well, and a fine string of catfish was the result of their efforts.

All were now in excellent spirits, and during the noonday meal Jeremiah Sampson broached the subject of a permanent location.

"How far into the interior do you intend to go, Captain Brant?"

"I had hardly given the matter a thought, Mr. Sampson, and really cannot say that I have any objective point."

Moses Keys was ordinarily a very quiet man. Apparently being pleased with anything suitable to the remainder of the party, but when the question of a location was being discussed he appeared quite interested, and entered into the conversation with a vim that surprised everybody.

"In my stroll of the morning," he explained, "I chanced upon a mill dam, and an old rotten structure, which has evidently, some time in the past, been used for milling purposes, near the place where this little branch empties into the big muddy river. It is only a short distance away, and the land lying

between the old mill and our camp would make an ideal farm. We have left the rugged hills of St. Charles behind, and I for one am in favor of locating just where we are, provided we can get the proper concession from the present owners."

As all were becoming tired of the long journey, they readily agreed upon the idea as advanced by Mr. Keys, Rastus, especially, from some mysterious cause, being very much in favor of stopping near the settlement.

Away back about the year of 1789, Pierre Chautau had secured one of the earlier land grants comprising the larger portion of the territory surrounding the present site of the settlement of St. Charles, and it was he who had built the mill dam and erected the old shack which Keys had discovered earlier in the day.

The morning following the decision to locate at this point found Captain Brant and Jeremiah Sampson astride their ponies, starting in quest of the proper authorities with which to make the deal for the land. They had very little trouble in securing the required permission, as the present owners were desirous of having the territory in the immediate vicinity of the village properly developed. They returned the same afternoon with the glad news of their splendid success, and the men folk at once set about securing suitable sites for what was to be their permanent homes. Ere another month neat log cabins had been erected, and while it was a little late in the season, the men worked steadily on, sowing and planting, poor old Rastus and little Tommy Keys coming in for their full share of the hard

labor, while the women and the smaller children were kept busy looking after the household duties and the cattle and ponies that were not in use. Everybody went about their work willingly and without complaint with the possible exception of the old darkey, who was continually complaining.

"I tells yo', Marse Brant, I jest wish dis ole niggah was dead, fo' dis workin' an' workin' an' workin' am hurtin' me pow'rful bad."

"Oh, never mind, Rastus. The work is a little hard at present for a fact, but if we have good luck this season, our duties next year need not be so laborious, and besides it's only your feelings that's being hurt. You'll get along all right."

Brant would jolly him along, and keep him in the best of humor, occasionally granting him permission to visit the settlement, which seemed to revive his spirits more than anything else.

Thus began the forming of the estates which were to be the homes of the Brants, the Keys, and the Sampsons for generations, materially aiding in the formation of the nucleus for the colonization and upbuilding of central Missouri, and for years after the families, when speaking of their location, were pleased to narrate the story of the poor crippled dumb brute, the ox, attributing the cause of their stay in the community wholly to that particular affair.

Thus it is that the *merest incident* may sometimes be the most potent factor in the shaping of human destiny.

CHAPTER V.

PRIMITIVE SOCIETY AND PASTIMES.

The same spring that brought our band of pioneers to the vicinity of St. Charles also witnessed the coming of Jules Pierron ("Pierrong"), a dashing young Frenchman, from New Orleans. He was a whole-souled, good-natured fellow, possessing a genial and courteous disposition, and a very marked degree of culture and refinement. He was slight of build, standing perhaps five feet five in his stocking feet; dark complexioned, of course, with raven-black hair, and a pair of piercing black eyes, one glance only, being, seemingly, sufficient to penetrate to the innermost recesses of the soul; the nose was prominent, but not altogether out of proportion; the contour of the face was strikingly attractive; a tiny black mustache adorned the upper lip and a firmly set jaw and square chin, indicating a wonderful amount of firmness and determination.

The site which he had selected for a home lay directly midway between the Brant homestead and the settlement, and here he spent the long lonesome hours of the summer days, clearing and planting, but night nearly always found him at the settlement

taking a very prominent part in any festivities that might be in progress.

Acquaintances were easily acquired in those early days. Comparatively all had come westward upon the same mission, in search of homes, and all seemed to be involuntarily linked in one common brotherhood; the formalities of an introduction were dispensed with and every man was taken in as a gentleman; but woe be to the individual who proved otherwise, for his days in the settlement were bound to be few and full of trouble.

Pierron's genial disposition at once made him the reigning favorite of the younger set, and at the numerous parties and dances which were at this time in vogue, he was looked upon with much favor by the early day belles of the settlement, while the male contingent, although burdened with a certain degree of jealousy and envy deep down in their hearts, were forced to look on, apparently well pleased with the proceedings.

At this time a very friendly feeling existed between the settlers and the Indians, and it was not an infrequent occurrence to see the red men of the forest and the shy Indian maidens taking part in the festivities. In fact, the intimacy had assumed such gigantic proportions that inter-marriages were already looked upon in a matter-of-fact way, and no doubt a great many of the present day generation could easily trace the blood of the "Iowa's" or the "Sac and Fox" through their ancestral veins.

The older people of the village seemed to think it very strange that the young man did not select a

wife from among his coterie of admirers, and were wont to speak of the matter among themselves very freely, quaint rumors occasionally reaching the ears of Pierron himself, but he paid not the slightest attention to what he heard, and toiled on and on, treating every one with whom he came in contact with that marked degree of cordiality and respect that had characterized his stay in the community; avoiding, with the alertness of the Indian, any action that could be construed as showing partiality toward any of his fair admirers. But why? was the question that passed from mouth to mouth. Even at this time "Dame Rumor" was afloat in the land, and the busybodies were working overtime in an attempt to fathom the mystery. Some thought that he had perhaps left a wife in New Orleans. Others, that he had committed some dastardly crime, and was living in constant fear of detection; but all were wrong. Pierron had long since formed an ideal in his fanciful brain, but thus far all of his idols had been shattered. He had not yet met the one. GOD had not yet selected his soul mate; but the time was near at hand for the appearance of the chosen one, and the edifying consummation of the contract hymenial.

Late one afternoon in the latter part of August, as he was going alone to the settlement to attend a feast which had been scheduled for that particular date, he fell in with a party of "Iowa's," who were journeying in the same direction. One of the number was a very pretty Indian maiden, who at once attracted the attention of the young Frenchman by her intelligent look and coy Indian manners. He

was greatly interested, and upon making inquiry, was informed that the girl's name was "Tonowa," a princess of the tribe. Her father, an adventurous French trader and trapper, had died when the child was a mere infant, leaving her to the sole care of the full-blooded Indian mother, who had reared her after the manners and customs of the dusky tribesman. The girl had, however, been accustomed to attending the numerous festivals of the settlement, and by thus being brought in contact with the settlers had acquired a very smattering knowledge of the French and English languages. Although not able to speak it fluently, she could converse very intelligently with Pierron, and the acquaintance formed upon this occasion led to the young man being invited to her wigwam. He was not long in accepting of her hospitality, and the curiosity which at first had aroused his soul to action, soon ripened into an undying love. His affections were returned, and within a few weeks after their first meeting, Jules Pierron led the young Indian maiden to the altar, a blushing Indian bride, and at once retired with his new-found love to the quietude of his little log cabin home, nestled back among the hills, where they lived for a short time in elysian bliss, utterly oblivious to the workings of the outer world. Living for each other alone. But their happy dream of love was shortly to have an awakening.

For some unknown cause, the dusky relatives of the young bride had from the beginning seriously objected to the union, and ever since the marriage had harbored ill feelings toward Pierron. Late one afternoon, shortly before the time for his return

from the arduous labors of the field, the already strained situation was brought to an abrupt climax.

The only brother of the Princess, with some of the most daring young bucks of the tribe, seized her and carried her off to the wilderness. When Pieron returned and found his wife missing, he was almost overcome with fear, but he at once suspected the cause of her absence and lost no time in spreading the alarm. Soon a large body of men from the settlement and surrounding community were on hand, ready to aid in the search. Captain Brant assumed the role of leader, and the party at once gave chase to the kidnappers, but every device known to Indian cunning had been used to cover up the trail, and after a fruitless search of three days the party returned to the settlement without having gained the slightest intimation of the whereabouts of the missing wife. They had given her up for lost, but not so the husband. The strong, faithful heart kept up the search for many long days thereafter.

Meantime the young captive had been taken to an Indian village far in the interior, where she was bound hand and foot with stout strips of deerskin, and placed under the strict surveillance of two old squaws. In this manner she was held a prisoner.

From the very beginning she had been quite alert; ever watchful for an opportunity to escape. The time finally came. One night the old women, worn completely out from the long, continuous watch, fell asleep. All day long a gentle rain had been falling, and the incessant patter on the wigwam gave notice of the continuation throughout the night. Now was the opportunity. The girl crawled

stealthily to the door, raised the flap and held her wrists out under the drip, the thongs soon became wet and pliable, and she had no trouble in releasing her hands. It was then only a moment's work to untie her feet, and she was free. She dashed out in the awful darkness, followed by the loud cries of the guards, who had discovered the attempt to escape almost before she was out of the wigwam. The alarm spread rapidly, and was not long in reaching the ears of her brother, who, with a band of the fleetest warriors, at once gave chase.

The darkness impeded the progress of both pursued and pursuers, and the next morning found Tonowa only a short distance from the village. Her Indian cunning and sagacity had led her to believe that the wisest plan would be to go in the opposite direction from St. Charles, and make a broad detour in reaching her destination. A wise decision, for the pursuers naturally supposed that she would start in the direction of the settlement, and consequently were thrown completely off the trail.

About noon of the day following her escape she came face to face with one of the young bucks who had aided the brother in the kidnapping, who had been away on a long hunting expedition, and was just returning to the village. He at once recognized her, and made a strong effort to effect the recapture, but the maiden took to her heels with the fleetness of a deer. The Indian could do nothing but follow, as he had received strict orders from the brother not to harm her in any way. For some time the race was about even, but the young wife, spurred on by the excitement and the earnest desire to re-



THE MAIDEN TOOK TO HER HEELS WITH THE FLEETNESS OF A DEER.—(Chap. V.)

(*Diverging Paths*)

turn to her husband, soon left her pursuer far behind. When out of his sight for a few moments, she seized a club, and slipped deftly behind a large elm tree. Soon the Indian made his appearance, stealthily following her trail. When near the tree behind which the maiden was hiding, she jumped from her place of concealment and dealt him a heavy blow on the head, which stretched him on the ground senseless. When he regained consciousness the object of his pursuit had disappeared entirely. He at once returned to the village and gave the alarm.

Meantime the party headed by Tonowa's brother, which had started in search of the maiden immediately after her daring escape, had as she expected gone in the direction of St. Charles, and, as a matter-of-fact, had lost the trail entirely, returning to the village just at the moment when the unfortunate young buck was giving an account of his adventure with the girl of only a few short hours before. The party again started in pursuit, this time on the right trail.

For many days Tonowa wandered on through the forest, subsisting altogether on berries and what other substance of life the wilderness afforded. Many times during the long chase the party of searchers would be closely upon her, but by wading streams, and practicing many other deceptive Indian tactics, she was enabled to elude her pursuers. Late one evening she crawled into a hollow log to rest her tired bones awhile, and was barely hidden away when the pursuers came upon the spot. They at once went into camp, building a fire and cooking

their strips of venison, the brother sitting on the very log which so effectually concealed the object of his search.

All night long she was compelled to lay very quiet in her cramped position, not daring to move or make the slightest noise from fear of detection. The long, weary hours of the night dragged slowly by, and when morning came at last, the Indians, after eating a hastily prepared meal, proceeded on their way, not once suspecting the presence in their camp of the very object of their pursuit. When the party had gone, Tonowa crawled from her place of concealment more dead than alive, from the long days of travel and exposure and the cramped position in which she had been forced to lay throughout the night, but not in the least daunted in her purpose, she hobbled on, footsore and weary.

Although accustomed to roaming through the forest at will since childhood, the roundabout way which she had taken in the effort to elude her pursuers, had thrown her completely off the trail, and she wandered on aimlessly, not knowing whither to go.

Early in the day her attention was attracted by the peculiar actions of what she at first thought a large fly, but which, upon closer inspection, proved to be a honey bee leisurely sipping at the petals of a wild rose. Her heart gave a leap for joy, for she knew by the discovery that the settlement could not be far away. A life spent in the forest had taught her many of the peculiarities of animal and insect life, and she knew that the honey bee, no matter how far away from home she might wander in

search of provisions for her winter storehouse, when the little receptacles which nature has provided for her use are filled, she invariably makes a straight line for home, never loitering nor deviating from the course the barest possible fraction.

Tonowa watched the little fellow flit from flower to flower quite intently, not losing sight of the precious guide for a single moment. After awhile others came, and as each bee secured, seemingly all of the provisions it cared to carry, it would rest a short moment only, then rise high in the air and shape its course toward the south and east, the same direction that all of the others had taken. For some time she watched the little laborers at their work, then, feeling fully satisfied, pushed bravely on in the direction which the bees had taken.

About noon she came to a small stream and stopped awhile upon its grassy banks to rest. She was ever on the alert, and her keen eyes soon discerned some very familiar-looking objects farther down, sitting close to the water's edge, apparently fishermen. She slipped cautiously back into the shelter of the forest, and moved along very stealthily in the direction of the strangers, intent on finding out whether they be friend or foe. Gaining an advantageous point of view she could easily make out the objects to be friends, and good ones at that. It was Old Rastus and Tommy Keys, who had been permitted to take a day off, and had come a long way up the stream with the expectation of playing havoc with the finny tribe.

Overjoyed at the sight of friends, she rushed

madly forward as fast as her weakened condition would permit.

At the moment when Tonowa appeared Rastus was just getting a nibble on a heavy throw line, the loose end of which had been tied to a tree on shore, and was telling Tommy the old story of the weight of the fish he was going to catch, talking all the time in a whisper of course.

"Yes, sah, Tommy, dat am a bery fine fish. He sho' am a dandy. I jest knows he's gwine to weigh fifteen pounds or mo'."

"But I do not see, Rastus, how it is possible for you to tell the exact weight of a fish before you have it out of the water."

"Dat am easy, Tommy. De fish am done got scales on his back" And the old negro chuckled at his own witticisms.

For some cause the old darkey at this moment casually glanced over his shoulder, and saw Tonowa just as she appeared upon the spot. As usual, fear at once seized him. He jumped straight in the air with a mighty yell, and fell flat on his back in the water. Tommy jumped to his feet, not knowing what was the matter with Rastus. When he beheld Tonowa he was greatly surprised, but for a moment only. Although her clothing had been torn to shreds, he at once recognized her and knew that they had nothing to fear.

In the meantime Rastus was floundering in the water like a chicken with its head cut off. He had become tangled in the throw line and would have no doubt drowned had it not been for the quick

work of Tonowa and Tommy. They seized the heavy line and began pulling it in. The large hook on the end of the heavy line had caught fairly in the seat of the old negro's trousers, and he presented a very comical sight as he was pulled out on the grass, which brought smiles to even the thin face of Tonowa.

He was not seriously hurt, however, and in a very short time had completely recovered from the shock.

"Well, bress de Lawd, if dat ain't Missa Tonowa," the old darkey exclaimed.

"Yes, Rastus, I am fatigued and weary from travel and exposure. I can hardly walk. Please take me to my home and husband at once."

"Sho', Missa Tonowa. Dis ole niggah does feel pow'rful sorry fo' yo', 'cause I done know dat you lub dat Marse Pierron almost to distraction."

The ponies were brought at once and the little party started toward the settlement.

As the horses trotted gently along, little Tommy's mind was ever busy, he could not refrain from laughing to himself, his little soul seemed to be filled with childish glee. Rastus finally noticed his merriment and inquired as to the cause.

"I was just wondering, Rastus, if the fish we caught on the throw line really had scales on his back."

"Look heah, Tommy, didn't yo' mammy always teach yo' bettah manners dan to snicker in company?"

Rastus could not for the life of him see the

funny part of anything, especially if he had been made the butt of the joke.

Late in the afternoon they arrived at the Brant homestead. The news of the safe return of Tonowa was at once carried to the ears of Pierron, and you may rest assured that he lost no time in covering the distance separating the two cabins. At sight of his wife his joy knew no bounds. He clasped her gently to his breast and showered kiss after kiss upon her pale forehead, the sacred imprint of an undying love.

The morning following her return she was taken to the stockade at St. Charles for safety, as Pierron well knew that the Indians would put forth every effort to effect the recapture; but they were not molested further, and within a short time Tonowa's relatives became reconciled to the marriage, and were ever after the steadfast friends of young Pierron.

Late in the winter following the daring escape and return of Tonowa to her home, the lives of the happy pair were brightened by the appearance of a bright-eyed baby girl, Tonowa knowing for the first time the real joys of motherhood.

When the child was only three weeks old the proud parents carried the precious bundle of humanity to the little church in the settlement, where the good FATHER administered the sacred rights of baptism, and christened the new born Genevieve Pierron.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEATH OF RASTUS.

The years had slipped by very fast, and true to the prophesy of Father Ribalt, the vast country lying west of the great Father of Waters had undergone a wonderful transformation. The large body of land purchased from Napoleon in 1803 through the urgent expansionist ideas of President Jefferson and the rare diplomatic skill of Livingston and Monroe for the round sum of fifteen million dollars, although reluctantly ratified by Congress, had proven the greatest investment the sisterhood of American states had thus far made. Thousands of immigrants were annually flocking to the new Eldorado, and villages had appeared as if by magic. The shores of the Big Muddy were dotted all along with settlements and trading stations. Thousands of acres were under cultivation. The Indian had long since immigrated to the undulating plains of what is now the state of Kansas, following closely in the wake of the deer and buffalo as they were pushed farther and farther westward by the advance of the pioneer through the forest. The population had increased so rapidly that the people were constantly clamoring for self-government, and in

1821 the Congress of the United States had acceded to their wishes, and carved from the Territory of Louisiana the great State of Missouri.

The war of 1812 had come and gone, leaving those joys and sorrows which follow in the wake of a fierce conflict; joys for the returning heroes and sorrows for those unfortunate ones who had lost their lives during the long months of bloody warfare; but these occurrences were long since forgotten and would only be brought to mind upon the occasion of some old veteran becoming reminiscent, relating the story of some personal adventure, something almost invariably illustrative of Indian cunning and treachery.

Captain Brant had taken a very prominent part in the struggle, and, returned from the front covered with glory, but with an empty coat sleeve dangling at his side; Jules Pierron had clung valiantly to the cause of the Union, and fought bravely by the side of Captain Brant throughout many severe engagements, returning at the close of the war adorned with the sobriquet of lieutenant. But of the original band of volunteers which had so bravely marched from the settlement at the very beginning of the struggle, a goodly number never returned. Some were destroyed by the ravishing clutches of disease, some by Indian treachery and others upon the field of battle. Among the latter being Moses Keys, who had fallen bravely fighting, one of the unlucky few who had lost their lives at the time of the ignominious defeat of Rochambeau at New Orleans.

Mrs. Keys was almost heart-broken when she re-

ceived the first news of the death of her husband, and was only sustained by the one great fact, that he had given his life to a noble cause. From that time the sole management of the Keys estate devolved upon Tommy, then a young man of nineteen, and he had been so successful in the undertaking that at this time the family was purported wealthy.

Time had dealt kindly with the Brants, and they had accumulated an abundance of this world's goods. The only dark spot thus far to blur their clear sky of happiness had been the death of the faithful old servant, Rastus.

Shortly after the coming of the families to the new territory, he had taken unto himself a wife; a dusky damsel belonging to the family of old Uncle Nathaniel Kibbey, who had preceded the Brants to the settlement only a short time. Aunt Chlo, as she was familiarly called, had been very instrumental in the raising of the Brant children, and a great source of comfort and consolation to the family during the absence of Captain Brant, when the dread knell of war had called him to his country's aid. Only a few years after the return of the Captain from the war, he and Rastus were out in the timber felling trees, preparatory to a clearing for a cornfield. They were working on a very large elm, and as it began to fall the loud creaking noise frightened the poor old fellow, and he started to run, but in the excitement went in the direction that the tree was falling, and was caught in the tangled branches. The mangled form was hurriedly extricated and carried with the utmost dispatch to the Brant homestead. The best of medical aid was at once

summoned, but it was too late. The poor old fellow was beyond earthly assistance, and the doctor advised them that he could live only a few hours. Everything that could possibly be done to alleviate the pain and suffering which he endured was forthcoming, and his last hours on earth were made as comfortable as willing hands could make them. A short time before the end came he regained consciousness for a few moments only, but in this short space of time was enabled to relieve his troubled soul of a great burden which he had been carrying for a long time. When the eyes slowly opened they wandered to Captain Brant, who had stood faithfully by his side throughout the trying ordeal, and in a feeble whisper poured out his soul's sorrow:

"Masse Johnson, I knows fo' sho' dat dis ole body ain't long for dis world, an' I wants to ask yo' fergiveness befo' I go. Yo' 'members dat ole ox what I say done got stung, de bery first night we camped on dis hill? Well, de night we stayed in de settlement I met Miss Chlo, an' I wanted to stay near St. Charles so bad dat I done gone an' hit dat ox 'spressly on purpose. Chlo was de cause of dat transgression, but I wants yo' to forgive her, too, 'cause doan' de good book say dat de Lawd done fergive Eve fo' tem't'n' Adam in de Garden of Eden? Oh, Marse Johnson, where am all dat sweet music? I can see——" but the sentence was never finished. With a smile playing upon the old wrinkled brow he lapsed into unconsciousness. As the great round sun was disappearing behind an embankment of foliage, spreading the robe of darkness over old mother earth, the spirit of the

faithful old colored friend passed to the great beyond. His lifetime fear of danger had ultimately resulted in his death.

They buried him in the family graveyard 'neath the overhanging branches of a giant oak, and erected a neat marble slab marking the last resting place of him who had been a faithful servant in this life, and had been called to his just reward, when the trials and troubles of life were o'er. To this day, could the spot be found, no doubt a weather-beaten, moss-covered slab would be unearthed, bearing this very interesting inscription:

SACRED to the memory of
RASTUS BRANT,
Who departed this life, June 19th, 1825.

"A friend just passed to the great beyond,
The journey that all must go,
His skin was as black as the raven's coat,
But his heart was as white as snow."

When the last clod of moist earth had been placed upon the little mound, the mourners, with one accord, knelt by the grave to do homage to the departed soul, Aunt Chlo falling prostrate upon the new-made grave, piercing the atmosphere with her agonizing screams:

"Oh, Lawdy, Lawdy, Lawdy, what am goin' to become ob dis poo' ole soul, now dat de good Lawd am done gone an' take Rastus away?"

The noble manhood in Brant asserted itself most forcibly at this time. With tears streaming down

his face, he gently raised the poor old servant to her feet.

"Do not worry, Aunt Chlo," he exclaimed. "As long as Johnson Brant has a cent to his name, you shall never want for anything in this world. Come, now, we must go away. The poor dead body's at rest." And the little party slowly wended their way toward their respective abodes.

The curtain of life had fallen and the earthly remains of poor old Rastus had forever passed from view.

The twins, Ivan and Irving were at this time almost grown, but from infancy, although bearing a striking resemblance in so far as outward appearances were concerned, their general make-up was far different. Ivan was of a rather taciturn disposition, holding himself aloof from the world, not caring to mingle with society, delighted only in expostulating and theorizing upon any pet subject which might, for the time being, come to mind; in fact, the older he grew the more fanatical he became along these lines. He was right, everybody else was wrong; he never had the courage to stop and figure on the practicability of putting into execution anything that he himself wanted done; never once having in mind the welfare of his fellow-man.

His quiet disposition had early led his parents to believe that Ivan was in every way fitted for the ministry, and they had urged upon him the study of theology, and were at this time living in great anticipation of his one day becoming a man of great distinction. He had early shown a natural adapta-

tion to music, and from practice had become an adept at the keyboard.

Irving was altogether different. He was a jolly good-natured chap, reckless to a certain degree, but not beyond the power of endurance, never talking for the sake of argument, always ready to go out of his way, if necessary, to bestow a favor; mingling freely with society, practical in all his undertakings, and by his actions showing to the world that it was his one great desire "to live and let live."

It had long been conceded that at maturity Ivan should marry Miss Cecelia, the youngest daughter and admittedly the prettiest of the Keys household. She had been born a few years after the settlement was made, and had been reared to young womanhood on the old homestead. From childhood they had played together, and as the years went by, their fondness for each other gradually ripened into love. At this time they were almost constantly together. Every summer evening, the weather permitting, found them at the Old Mill Dam at the mouth of the stream, their usual haunt, where they would linger for hours, looking perhaps into the future.

Dreams of a home 'neath the moon's silvery light,

Watched by the waters 'till lost in the night,

Pledges of constancy and undying love,

Sealed with a kiss from the heavens above.

They seemed to live for each other alone, not caring in the least for the companionship of others. And while it would be inferred from the sunny dis-

position of the young maiden that her heart sometimes yearned for the pleasures of society, yet she clung with a noble persistency to the absurd ideas of Ivan in the matter, and obstinately refused to have any intercourse with the world at large. The constant companionship had made him her idol; the only love with the possible exception of that of a mother's, that her faithful heart ever knew.

For long hours they would sit quietly upon the banks of the stream, indulging in day dreams, Cecelia perfectly content to be near the object of her adoration, while the quietness and solitude of the surroundings blended perfectly with the young man's repulsive soul. He was indolent in a way, yet ambitious to attain a commanding position in the ranks of the few who are able to scatter their names broadcast throughout the land and cause their influence to be felt wherever mentioned. But his was not the nature for this exalted station in life, as he afterwards learned, but alas! too late.

For some time his parents had contemplated sending him to a theological seminary in one of the larger cities in the East, in order that he might more thoroughly equip himself with a knowledge of the great work before entering upon the first lap of his ministerial career, and at this time had all necessary arrangements made for the journey.

The last evening before the date set for his departure was spent with Cecelia at their accustomed trysting place, her faithful heart every ready with words of love and encouragement, overjoyed at the prospect of one day becoming the wife of a man whose name would perhaps become famous as an

exhorter of the many evident truths of the Word of God, planning the thousand and one little details of a home—things which could only originate in the fertile brain of a womanly woman.

"I know we shall be happy, Ivan, dear," she was wont to say.

"Yes, Cecelia; thus far Providence has smiled upon us. We have been blessed with all the good things of life and should indeed be happy."

"But to think, Ivan, to-morrow you go away for, oh, so long," and a tiny tear slowly trickled down upon the rosy cheek.

"Do not worry, little girl. Time, as ever, will go swiftly by, and when my school days are over I shall return to my home, to find a true heart waiting to greet me as of yore. Absence will only cement the ties of love, and when we are married, our happiness will be the sweeter and brighter."

"I shall never cease to think of you, dearest Ivan, and when the long tiresome evenings find you pouring over some difficult problem, I shall be kneeling in my little bedchamber offering up a fervent prayer for your welfare and safety."

"And I, Cecelia darling, shall be strengthened by your great love. My task will be lightened a thousandfold by a knowledge of your constancy, and I shall live, only awaiting the day when I can clasp you to my breast and claim you for my very own."

His strong arm stole gently around her waist, and her pretty curly head went sobbing upon his bosom. Oh, what rapturous joy! The first real realization of a childhood love! The whole world was cast into oblivion, and they were left without interruption to

dream away the time. The old moon, as if to hide the lovers from view, had slipped behind an embankment of clouds, and they were left entirely alone in their new-found happiness, drifting away from the trials and tribulations of the world upon the wings of love.

They were at last startled into a realization of the lateness of the hour by the sound of voices coming from the direction of the old mill structure, which had long ago been abandoned and left to decay.

It is needless to say, of course, that the change in the situation—being brought from the brilliant and fascinating light of love into a realization of the Stygian darkness of night—frightened the swain no little bit, and they were not long in placing quite a distance between themselves and the “lovers’ roost,” as the place was frequently called.

At the Keys home Ivan bade Cecelia goodby for the last time prior to his journey East, and left the faithful soul to sob out the remaining weary hours of the night in the privacy of her own little room.

The Brant homestead was south of the Keys dwelling a distance of about three-fourths of a mile, the main traveled road from St. Charles intersecting the North and South road midway between the two places. At the corners, a distance of two or three hundred yards back from the road running north and south, old Uncle Jeremiah Sampson had erected a neat little cottage in which he and Aunt Belinda were spending their declining years. They lived from the income of their landed interests, and were supposed to have laid by a goodly sum for a rainy day besides. They were seldom away from,

home, night always finding them in the cottage, never retiring later than eight o'clock.

On the night in question, as Ivan Brant was hurrying home after leaving Cecelia at her parental domicile, his attention was attracted by a bright light burning in the Sampson cottage. What on earth could it mean? And at this late hour of the night? He was naturally a little bit worried over the peculiarly strange voices he and Cecelia had heard emanating from the old mill structure earlier in the evening. It was certainly an eventful night, and his curiosity by this time had become thoroughly aroused. Although fear had taken possession of him, he decided at once to make an investigation, fearing that the aged couple might possibly be sick and in want of assistance. He quickly covered the distance intervening and peeked in at the window from which the golden stream of light was pouring, but nothing out of the ordinary was there to be seen. The candle was burning briskly, but not a soul was astir. He turned to go, but ere he had taken a step bethought himself of the necessity of making further investigation, inasmuch as the old couple were quite feeble and might have possibly met with some serious accident. He knocked on the door, but no response came; he knocked a second and a third time, but with no better results, grasping the latch, it readily yielded to his touch, and the door swung gently open. He picked up the lighted candle and advanced to the door leading to the bedroom, which was standing slightly ajar. With a light push it easily opened, and as the light streamed in he was confronted with one of the most

ghastly and grewsome spectacles of which the human mind could possibly conceive. There, prone upon the floor, lay the lifeless form of Uncle Jeremiah, a terrible gash in his forehead, from which the blood had flowed profusely, great splotches covering the floor of the entire room. On the bed, the lifeless form of Aunt Belinda evidenced the completeness of the villain's work. The room was turned almost upside-down; drawers had been ransacked, and the contents scattered everywhere about the room, not a single nook or cranny escaping the eyes of the murderers who were evidently bent upon robbery.

Ivan was frightened almost to death. He quickly replaced the candle in its original position, hurried out the door and along the road towards home as fast as his legs could carry him, never once stopping until he was safe behind the walls of his own room.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RELENTLESS FINGER OF SUSPICION.

It never occurred to Ivan that the proper thing for him to do under the circumstances would be to report the murder at once to the family, but as the night wore on and his sleepless eyes failed to respond to the call of nature, he was gradually brought to a knowledge of the great error he had committed. He at once arose and dressed, thinking to acquaint his father with the ghastly news, but the old mood of theorizing again captured him and he sat for a long time in a deep study.

"Of course he had witnessed the horrors of the weird and grewsome tragedy. Suppose he had, by any possible chance, been seen around the Sampson home, would not the crime be laid at his door? For hours he reasoned thus, finally deciding that discretion was the better part of valor, he again disrobed and retired, but no sleep for him that night. Every time his eyelids were closed, strange visionary objects would come before him. He would awake with a start and jump to a sitting posture in the bed, his eyes wide open and staring at the lighted candle or other familiar objects. The hallucination had entirely disappeared.

Morning came at last, and for once in his short life Ivan was elated to witness the beautiful sunrise. The other members of the family were astir bright and early, completing preparations for the journey. Mrs. Brant had seen to the packing of the trunk, and the carpet-bag which Ivan was to carry with him was filled with enough provisions to last almost the entire trip.

Breakfast over, the proud father drew up at the front gate with the sleek-coated team of horses that is to convey the young student to the landing. Here upon the doorstep of the old farmhouse is enacted one of the most beautiful, yet sorrowful scenes of pastoral life. Scenes that have occurred a thousand, yes, a million, times since in the common experience of the human race; one that it would seem impossible for any of the participants or onlookers to ever forget. To the mother it is one of the most vivid moments of her life—suffering and joy mingling and clashing in her mother's heart. She will remember it as keenly as the day of her marriage, or the day when the pangs of childbirth over, she clasped the first born, the dimpled-checked twins, to her breast.

Now the boys have grown to man's estate, and Ivan is going away from the old home, seeking broader fields. Though the mother's pride bids her let him go, the parting is bitter, for well she knows that when the conveyance moves on, it will take away a portion of her own life with it. Her son will have broken the home ties and will be her son in just the same old way no longer. But the heroic soul stifles her own feelings to think of him

and his future. She lays her hand gently on his shoulder, and with a tender parting kiss she admonishes him to be honest and brave, and to resist temptation. Her farewell words being only an appeal to remember the old people who stay behind. "Don't forget the old folks at home."

The young man chokes with emotion and cannot answer. His tearful eyes gaze absently across the wide field of the old farm. To him it is the parting between the past and the future; the emotional conflict between a maternal love and the consummation of his ambition. The twin brother, Irving, standing by the door, closely feels the solemnity of the moment, and hastens with words of consolation to the mother's side; tears are moistening the eyes of the father sitting in the wagon; even the old dog seems conscious of something strange taking place. What a golden wreath of human experience is concentrated within the scene.

Standing in the open doorway the mother and brother wave an affectionate farewell as the conveyance slowly disappears in the distance, then go quietly about the labors connected with the daily routine of farm life.

At the landing, Ivan went aboard the little packet for St. Louis, at which place he was to take a side-wheeler for the long journey up the Ohio, retracing the course taken by the little band of pioneers under the leadership of Captain Brant twenty years before; but what a wonderful change in the mode of transportation; 1807, the same year that brought the twins into the light of day, also witnessed an invention which was destined to revolutionize river

navigation; Robert Fulton, a mechanical genius, had invented the steamboat, and at this time the product of his master mind, was plying upon almost all of the navigable streams. The keel boat and the flat boat had long since been relegated to the rear, in so far as passenger traffic was concerned.

When Captain Brant returned from the landing late in the afternoon, he was confronted with the startling information of the discovery of the dastardly crime which had been committed at the Sampson home on the previous night. About the middle of the afternoon, Old Aunt Chlo had hobbled over to the Sampson farm to "Pay ma' 'spects to Missa B'linda," as she would commonly say when narrating the story afterwards, and had made the gruesome discovery. The entire countryside were aroused and at once congregated at the Brant home to decide upon some plan of investigation, and when Brant returned had found the yard filled with excited men and women, the crowd being momentarily increased by new arrivals. The Captain was at once placed at the head of the party, and a careful inspection of the Sampson premises was made, but no new discovery resulted. The crowd then divided into small bands and scoured the country for miles around for some tangible clue that might lead to the discovery of the miscreant or miscreants, whichever the case might be. The entire night was spent in the fruitless search, morning finding them as far from a knowledge of the facts in the case as they were at the beginning.

The next day the excitement had subsided to a certain degree, and the remains of the victims were

conveyed to the little church on the road to the settlement, where they were laid at rest, the funeral being attended by the largest concourse of people ever assembled on an occasion of this kind in the history of the community. The obsequies over, the large crowd divided into little knots and seemed to be excitedly discussing some affair. Brant noticed the excitement, but thinking it due to the circumstances attending the occasion, did not care to ask the reason, and went directly home, never once dreaming of the actual cause of the mysterious disturbance.

The next morning bright and early the bailiff, with two deputies, appeared at the Brant homestead, and were met at the gate by the Captain, who at once made inquiry about any new information which might have been received relative to the murder. For a moment all was quiet, then the bailiff stepped forward, courteously addressing the Captain: "My dear Mr. Brant, I want to assure you that this is a most painful duty, but acting upon the information already received, I find myself under the necessity of arresting your son, Irving, for the crime."

For a moment Brant stood as if transfixed. "My God, man, you do not mean to say that my son could have committed such a dastardly crime? It is some false accusation."

"Let us hope, Captain, that it is not true; but for the present we must do our duty. Where is Irving?"

"He is in the house, gentlemen; but I pray you be calm and patient. I will call him to us, and you have my word that there will be no attempt at es-

cape. I feel sure that he has been wrongfully accused, and that he is only the victim of malice on the part of some evildoers. Above all, my friends, do not let his mother know for the time being, that the least suspicion has been cast upon her own flesh and blood, as I fear the shock would be too trying on her already shattered nerves."

Irving came at his father's bidding, not the least shadow of suspicion crossing his mind as to the cause of the action until he was brought face to face with the very trying ordeal. The warrant for his arrest was produced and served. Irving seemed entirely overcome with surprise, and stood as if perfectly dumb, his face white with anger.

The poor old father could hardly withstay the torrent of emotion welling in his bosom, and with moistened eyes he grasped the hand of his son, demanding an utterance as to his guilt or innocence.

"Before GOD, father, I am innocent of any wrong-doing. I have not the least idea of the identity of any one who could have so willingly committed such a dastardly deed. The enormity of the crime is such that I feel greatly humbled by the accusation, but am not afraid of the consequences, as the God of all knows that I am innocent. I _____"

"And though the whole world pronounce you guilty, my son, I, your mother, believe in your innocence." Mrs. Brant had heard every word of the conversation between the father and the officers from the open doorway, and could retain herself no longer; like the mother beast, she instantly sprang to the protection of her offspring, mother instinct

stoutly prevailing against her weak physical nature. Coming at the moment that the accusation of guilt was so stoutly being denied she threw her arms around her son's neck and stood as if ready to defy the whole world.

"My dear, good mother, you are the best and truest friend on earth; how can it ever be possible for me to repay the kindness and care that your affectionate soul has bestowed? I pray you be calm and patient. You know that I am innocent, and the good Lord who watches over all is a witness to the fact. Let us put our trust in Him, and everything will come out right in the end, for "He doeth all things well. It is not mete that I should suffer for another's crime, but for the present I must play the part of 'an innocent victim of the relentless finger of suspicion.' "

"And who dares cast that finger?" queried Captain Brant. Then turning to the bailiff demanded from what source or by what means the information had been derived which had led to the arrest.

"Captain Brant, I have always been your friend, and I sincerely trust you will hold no ill will for the little part I am playing in the supposed culmination of this awful tragedy, as I am only doing my duty as an officer. The information we have is very strong. On the night of the tragedy, Lem Scroggins and Eph Christy, with their families, were returning from St. Charles, and as they were passing the Sampson cottage about 10.30 or 11 o'clock, noticed a bright light shining in the window. They were driving very slow, and just before they came even with the dwelling saw the ac-

cused hurriedly emanate from the open doorway and strike off at a good, brisk walk down the road towards home. They had not desired to prosecute, and had withheld the information this long, hoping against hope that they might have possibly been mistaken, but as nothing had developed to prove otherwise, they felt themselves compelled to act.

"Very well, my son, go with the officers, they are only discharging their duty, and remember, that your parents believe firmly in your innocence, and will leave no stone unturned to prove it."

After bidding his parents an affectionate goodbye, Irving Brant was led away to jail, to suffer the humiliation of imprisonment and the censure of press and public—a victim of circumstances.

The father at once set about the task of unraveling the mystery which had so unceremoniously led to Irving's arrest, but after many days of work and worry his efforts had proven futile. The neighbors and friends had lent every assistance, and were heartily in sympathy with the grief-stricken parents, but deep down in their hearts there was a growing belief of the young man's guilt. The evidence thus far adduced seemed to preclude any possibility of a mistake being made in the accusation, but on account of the young man's irreproachable record in the past, all held a very friendly feeling toward him, and were loath to speak of the affair among themselves, nor did any of the men folk especially allow any utterance to escape their lips which might in any way lead the parents to a knowledge of their true belief in the matter. True, the women could not refrain from discussing the affair among them-

selves, but their deep sympathy for the father and mother held them in subjugation to a certain extent, and even they had not allowed any information to be sent afloat which might reach the ears of the unsuspecting family.

During the first weeks of incarceration many of Irving's old friends had called to see him, but as the days went by the calls were gradually discontinued until none were left who seemed to be particularly interested in his welfare, except the faithful parents, who came almost daily with an ample supply of delicacies from the old farm home, filling his hopeful soul with kind words of love and encouragement.

Aside from the parents there was another intrepid soul who stood ready to defy the scorn and hatred of the whole world, if necessary, in defense of the character of the man she loved. Genevive Pierron, Irving's childhood sweetheart, had clung tenaciously to the belief in his innocence, and had quietly lent every effort toward unraveling the mystery, but thus far the prospects were not at all flattering.

The growing change of sentiment among Irving's best friends had already become a plain fact to Genevive, and while she alone, outside of the parents believed firmly in his innocence, her indomitable courage could not withstay the great tide of suspicion, and as her efforts were entirely separate from those of Irving's parents, she was left entirely alone in the fight for the honor of him in whom she reposed the utmost confidence. No; not entirely alone. At the very beginning her mother had been taken into her confidence, and she was being advised

by that shrewd, sagacious soul, who, years before, had braved the perils of an almost unexplored jungle, risking her own life in the successful attempt to elude her wily pursuers and return to her home and the man whom she had chosen as her soul mate. Genevieve possessed all the characteristics of her half-breed Indian mother, and her courageous spirit would not adhere to the word failure.

She had succeeded in bribing the guard whose duty it was to make the rounds from six o'clock in the afternoon to twelve o'clock midnight, and her visits to the young man's cell were almost nocturnal.

On the night of the tragedy, Irving had stayed at the Pierron home quite late, leaving about 10.30 to 11 o'clock, taking a path which led him directly through the Sampson farm, as was his usual custom, the paths emerging upon the main traveled road within a stone's throw of the cottage, which fact, when it had become known, only added fire to the flame of imagination and greatly strengthened the evidence already adduced.

All of this was well known to the faithful little soul, and her busy brain, although taxed to the utmost, could not possibly conceive of any means of proving his innocence. The sentiment had increased to such an extent that the enraged populace were already talking of the probable punishment to be meted out to the guilty wretch. Some of the less cautious ones were setting rumors afloat to the effect that the law might perhaps deal too leniently, and the people were contemplating taking the matter in their own hands.

This tommy-rot had not been long in reaching

the ears of Genevieve Pierron. She was almost heart-broken, and as a last resort for his safety she had insisted upon Irving's escape from jail. She had hit upon a plan which could not but prove successful, if put in operation, and had gone straight to him with the scheme, but with all of her arguing she could hardly induce the young man to give his consent to the plan.

"God knows I am innocent," he said, "why should I flee like a thief in the night?"

"And I firmly believe in your innocence; but time will have to prove it. For the present you are safe, but no telling how soon the imaginative public may be spurred to radical action by the fanatical cries of the less wise ones. Oh, Irving, you must fly. For my sake, I implore you. Will you not go before it is too late?"

"But Genevieve I——"

"There is no time to be lost. You must go. The guard is now awaiting my return outside. Remember, to-morrow evening at 8 o'clock. I will call as usual. Hold yourself in readiness for quick action. Goodby, sweetheart." Just one good-night kiss and she was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ESCAPE.

Irving watched the retreating form until it had disappeared down the long, dark corridor, then sat down upon the side of his little board bunk, the only furniture the dismal room contained, where he remained for hours, his head resting in his hands, his mind lost in deep thought. Even the guard in making the usual midnight rounds went unnoticed, so deep was the reverie. Along towards morning he fell into a troubled slumber from which he did not awake until aroused by the old negro who carried the meals to the prisoners. It was then almost seven o'clock, and the golden rays of the sun were already creeping in at the little window, giving notice of the advent of a beautiful day.

He had been asleep only about two hours, but in this short space of time had lived his life completely over. He had grown to man's estate surrounded by every luxury and pleasure that the heart could desire. He had courted and won one of the fairest creatures of earth, Miss Genevive Pierron; but ere he had been permitted to take her as his own, fate decreed that he should be confronted with the dread calumny of a false accusation, but he had lived to

see the real culprit apprehended and his innocence fully established. Just as the whole world were gladly taking him back with open arms as an innocent victim, he was rudely awakened by the old darkey, only to realize that his joyous dream was over. He was still incarcerated in the little dingy cell, his innocence yet in the hands of time.

All day long he paced the room, his mind fully absorbed with the problem of making his escape. At one moment he would be heartily in accord with the plan, but again his conscience would prick him sorely, and such a course, it would seem, could only tend toward convincing the public more thoroughly of his guilt. Never in his life had he labored more industriously to arrive at the proper solution of a confronting problem, yet the more he deliberated the harder it became for him to arrive at any definite conclusion. Sometimes he would feel as though he had become fully determined, but some slight objection would arise and the whole scheme be swept into nothingness in a twinkling. He finally gave up in despair, willing to leave the whole matter in the hands of her whom he had learned to know as his guardian angel.

Genevive had also spent a sleepless night, her active mind busy with the plan of procedure after the escape had been effected, figuring out every little detail with an accuracy akin to those well versed in criminology.

The next morning bright and early she hied herself to the Brant homestead, and very deftly laid the whole matter before Irving's parents. They at first strenuously objected to such a scheme. "I have

never yet been under the necessity of flying from danger, and I cannot see why the good Lord has brought upon my family anything that could possibly force such action," exclaimed Brant. "I have always done my duty toward God and my fellow-man fearlessly, and if even my own son could have possibly committed such a crime, I would say, 'He must pay the penalty.'"

But the persistent little soul would not take No for an answer.

"You do not believe for a moment that Irving is guilty, do you Mr. Brant?"

"The good Lord knows that I do not."

"Then why procrastinate? Why should we not proceed at once to place him beyond the pale of imminent danger, which I am ashamed to say is now threatening?"

"What? You do not mean to say that anything more than a fair and just trial will be accorded our boy?"

"No; not that. I notice that a great many of our former friends are acquiescing in the belief of Irving's guilt, and we ourselves have no foundation for our belief, except Irving's unswerving truthfulness and the rarest possible chance of a case of mistaken identity. You are aware that the tiniest snow-ball cast from the mountain top will, in its descent, gather to itself myriads of crystal flakes, rolling over and over until it assumes gigantic proportions, when it becomes a thing of destruction, razing everything in its path until finally precipitated upon the lower level, where it is left to the consuming process of the sun's rays. So it is with humanity.

The tiniest rumor may be set afloat, and as it spreads, gathers within its orbit the gleanings of each successor's idle imagination, until it finally reaches a fanatical stage, where sometimes the hot-headed ones predominate and the great storm of indignation cannot be stilled by the advice of the more cautious. This condition will eventually reach a climax, but ordinarily after some innocent victim has suffered from the follies of fanaticism.

"Do you understand, Mr. Brant? Have I made my reasons for the attempt to escape clear?"

"Yes, I fully understand. I had not seen the matter in that light before. You are correct. We should put forth every effort to effect the escape."

"But hold, Mr. Brant. I do not ask your assistance. I only desire your permission. I have nearly all arrangements made, and think I can more thoroughly work out the scheme alone!"

"My dear child, I can only say that you have our permission, and may God have mercy on our souls if we have done anything amiss."

The little campaigner had gained a decisive victory, and was now content to go on her way rejoicing.

She had but little time to spare, and went straight to the little cabin occupied by Old Aunt Chlo. As she entered the yard gate she espied the old colored lady working very industriously in her little garden, all the time crooning one of those precious mother's lullabies. Geneviève stopped and listened. As the strain was borne more plainly to her ears, a thrill of delight passed through her whole being. The melody was one that she had often heard Irving

humming as they had strolled in the moonlight, or lounged, perhaps, upon the green mossy banks of the idly flowing stream in the days prior to his confinement. Yes, it was the very one. No doubt Irving had learned it from the old negro "mammy" in childhood.

But no time was to be lost, and no matter how much she enjoyed the melody the joys of self must be sacrificed for the welfare of others.

"Good morning, Aunt Chlo," exclaimed Genevive in her very courtliest manner.

The old lady turned with the agility of a cat. "Fo' de Lawd's sake, if it ain't Missa Genevive. How is yo' dis mornin', anyhow? I jest been thinkin' 'bout yo' and dat poo' innercent boy dey's got ova there 'hind dem ole bars."

"Then, Aunt Chlo, you, too, believe in Irving's innocence?"

"Does I b'lieve in dat boy's innercence? Ob course I does. Didn't I done gone an' raise dat boy almost from de cradle up? An' I tell yo' I knows him jest like I does ma' Bible. Whoever say dat boy done anything wrong am done gone and lie, dat's all."

"Then, Aunt Chlo, you would not be averse to aiding in his escape from that horrid prison if you thought necessity demanded it, would you?"

"I sho' don't know what yo' means by dat 'averse,' but if dare is anything dat dis ole niggah can do to help dat boy, I'se sho' gwine to do it."

"I thank you, Aunt Chlo, from the bottom of my heart, for I, too, am deeply interested in his welfare."

She had adroitly led the old colored soul into an open confession of her belief and wishes in the matter, and was not long in securing her promise of assistance when needed.

"Hold yourself in readiness for immediate action," was the little general's command. "And, above all, do not let any one know that I have spoken to you relative to the matter, not even Mr. and Mrs. Brant, as I wish to observe the strictest caution in the undertaking."

"I sho' won't say anything, Missa Genevive, 'cause I'se mighty anxious to see dat boy git away. Doan't de Good Book say dat we must 'Lend a helpin' hand in de hour ob trouble?' An' dat boy am sho' needin' help, 'cause ole Marse Brant done told me dat he is an innercent victim of circumferences."

"You mean circumstances, Aunt Chlo."

"Sho' dat's what I mean, Miss Genevive."

A few more passing remarks relative to the gardening and the weather, and Genevive mounted her pony and rode directly home.

The long hours of the day seemed as weeks to the anxious soul. About the middle of the afternoon her father came hurriedly from the village with the startling news of pending trouble. The whole countryside were gathering, and it was feared that when night came an attempt would be made to rush the guard and secure the prisoner.

"The cowardly fools!" exclaimed Genevive. "Why did God ever put it in the hearts of human beings to be so fanatical and revengeful. They shall not succeed in their fiendish purpose. I will save

him, or my dead body shall bear evidence of the attempt."

Late in the afternoon the sun, which had peeped forth from a clear sky the whole day long, was hid behind an embankment of dark clouds, which quickly o'erspread the entire heavens. A drizzling rain began to fall, and as night came on, a darkness fell which could be likened only unto Erebus.

Surely Providence had smiled upon the little plotter, for the night could not be more appropriately fitted for the putting into execution of her daring scheme.

Irving, although being averse to the escape, could not but feel a sense of relief as the time for Genevive's visit drew near. He had eaten a very hearty meal, and awaited with patience the time for her arrival, little knowing of the impending danger that was lurking near.

When Genevive came to the outskirts of the village she secreted her pony in the thick chaparral and proceeded on foot, using the utmost caution. The town was already full of excited men, and the crowd was momentarily being augmented by new arrivals, but by using side streets she was enabled to reach the jail structure unnoticed.

Just as the town clock was striking the hour of eight, a faint footstep in the corridor of the jail gave notice to Irving of Genevive's promised visit, and his heart gave a great leap for joy, for long hours before he had gained a decisive victory in the great battle with his own conscience, and had learned to believe that upon the success of the daring girl's undertaking depended his physical wel-

fare, and well it was that he had arrived at this conclusion, for at that very moment the misguided fanatics were forming in the public square preparatory to a descent upon the jail, and were giving vent to their eagerness with yells and curses, all of which had been borne to Irving's ears through the open window of the jail, but he reckoned not the meaning thereof. As Genevive approached he hastened to inquire as to the cause of the mysterious "hubbub," and was almost stricken dumb with the startling answer:

"My God, Irving!" exclaimed the brave little soul, "there is not a moment's time to be lost if you would be saved from the wrath of those whom you once numbered as your friends. They have been transformed into human fiends, and are now thirsting for your very life. Come, you must fly at once, take my cloak and wrap it about you, and throw this long shawl over your head. I believe the disguise will be sufficient. Once outside, you are to go directly to the little bridge just beyond the village. About twenty paces north you will find my pony ready for immediate use. Mount and ride directly to my own home, where the pony must be left, but do not stop yourself. You can easily find your way on foot to Aunt Chlo's little cabin. She is one of your very best friends in this hour of trouble, and will be awaiting your coming."

"God bless you, little girl. I will do your bidding."

Every moment the shouts from the angry mob were becoming louder and Genevive knew that immediate action was their salvation.

"We must hasten. Here is a rope which I have smuggled in. Tie my hands and feet securely, and place this gag over my mouth. This done, you must fly—fly for your life."

Irving lost no time in doing as he was told, and after a parting embrace, cautiously walked down the corridor, past the guard at the gateway, who said not a word, and emerged upon the streets of the village.

The light sprinkle which had been falling all evening had turned to a steady drizzling rain, and the opaqueness of the night was almost impenetrable, all of which worked to the young man's advantage, and while he could hardly find his own way he had not the slightest trouble in eluding suspicion. He had barely reached the outskirts of the village when several shots rang out in rapid succession, followed by the loud cries of the infuriated mob, who had swooped down in a body upon the frail structure.

The bailiff had foreseen trouble, and proceeded forthwith to double the guard, but withal they were as a handful of chaff in a gale. The resistance was stubborn, but seemingly no power on earth could withstay the terrific onslaught of that infuriated body of humanity. The guards were soon overpowered and themselves held as prisoners, while the human fiends sought to accomplish their hellish purpose. The doors were battered down, and immediate search instituted for Irving Brant's cell, but in the semi-darkness they were unable to find it. A light was then secured, and the bailiff forced to lead the way. When they came to the little room they

were surprised to find the door wrenched from its fastenings and standing slightly ajar. The leaders at once pushed their way into the room only to find the apparently lifeless body of Genevive, bound hand and foot, and lying prone upon the floor.

The unlooked-for discovery served as a check to their reckless fury, and they hastened to liberate the girl. This done, all minds were centered upon the resuscitation of what they at once supposed to be another victim of the young dare-devil.

Genevive, although seemingly in a comatose condition, was awake to every move made by the mob, but her quick intuition had perceived the idea of feigning in order that they might be held in check as long as possible, thereby giving the prisoner ample time in which to make his escape.

After a considerable time had elapsed the pretty eyes opened and stared into vacancy as if the owner was still in a dazed condition, then as if suddenly remembering something she called:

"Where am I? What has happened? Oh, yes, I remember. Where is the guard? The guard ——" then fell back as if in a swoon.

The guard was hastily summoned and questioned as to the whole affair, offering the following explanation:

"This girl has been playing the part of an angel," he said. "She has been permitted to visit the prisoner quite often, keeping him well supplied with books and many other little conveniences which might be of great help in passing the time. She nearly always came late in the evening, staying usually about one-half hour. To-night she had been

inside perhaps fifteen minutes, when I noticed her coming out. She said not a word, as was her usual custom, but passed straight on. Her unusual actions at once attracted my attention and my suspicion was aroused. As the form was passing out of the gate, I yelled 'Halt!' at the top of my voice. You can imagine my surprise when the long black coat and shawl were cast aside and the prisoner (for by this time I had discovered the clever ruse) instead of obeying the command broke into a run. I at once brought my gun into action, but the darkness was so intense that I could not use it effectually. I kept on firing, however, in an attempt to warn the other guards, but had barely succeeded in attracting them to my assistance when we were all overpowered, as you know, and I have not before this time been permitted to tell the story."

When he had completed a murmur of discontent ran through the entire group. Some were for instituting immediate search, but the great majority had weakened and were for disbanding and returning to their homes, leaving the search to the officers.

Genevive had quickly revived under the bracing effect of the well-manufactured story of the guard, not a word of which had escaped her ever-ready ear, and as the mob began to disperse was borne with the tenderest care to her home by the strong arms of some of those who only a short time before were actually thirsting for the life of a human being.

The Pierrons were, of course, very profuse with their thanks for the valuable assistance rendered their child, and insisted upon the rescuing party accepting the hospitality of their home for the re-

mainder of the night, but all were seemingly very anxious to return to their homes, and hastened on, perhaps to atone for the grievous sin which they had contemplated and which had been narrowly averted, in the privacy of their own rooms. Repentent sinners. Who knows?

When they had departed a little council assembled in the sitting-room of the Pierron home to compare notes. Everything had went well. The plan, as mapped out by Genevive, had been carried into execution without a bobble. The brave soldier had gained another victory in the long struggle for her sweetheart's liberty, and was content to retire to her own bed for some much-needed rest, and to dream of him and his future, fully satisfied with the day's work done.

CHAPTER IX.

A WANDERER IN THE WIDE, WIDE WORLD.

From the very moment that he had made good his escape, Irving, although feeling a great sense of relief in so far as self was concerned, could not refrain from heaping condemnation upon his own soul for the cowardly manner in which he had deserted Genevive in the hour of danger, leaving her totally at the mercy of the infuriated mob. He had been greatly wronged, it was true, and was no doubt justifiable in making the attempt at escape, but how could he ever atone for the manner in which it had been accomplished if the poor, innocent girl should perchance be harmed in any way? His conscience smote him terribly. He had forgotten his own welfare entirely, thinking only of the safety of her whom he had so ruthlessly deserted.

In the darkness he had allowed the pony to wander on almost aimlessly, but animal instinct guided it on its way and the course had been shaped directly toward the Pierron home. Mrs. Pierron, the wily accomplice of the arch-plotter, had been patiently awaiting his coming, and as the pony with its burden drew near, a shadowy form glided out into

the darkness and threw open the gate. Then almost for the first time since mounting Irving was brought to a knowledge of his yet perilous position.

"My God, Mrs. Pierron, what have I done?" he exclaimed. "Base, low, contemptible wretch that I am, to leave that angel in the hands of that infuriated mob of demons. I have just been brought to a true light of myself and feel that I am the most miserable coward on earth. I shall return at once and give my own life if necessary for her protection."

"But hold one moment, Irving. Genevive has her plans well laid, and I do not believe that they will harm one hair of her head. You should feel greatly rejoiced at your almost miraculous escape from certain death."

"But, Mrs. Pierron, I would give my own life a thousand times over for her protection, and the very thought of her peril since the moment of my escape has almost driven me wild."

"Put your trust in God, Irving. He who so faithfully watches over all will not desert our darling in this trying hour. I have not only aided her in this perilous undertaking, but have constantly prayed for her success and safety. I firmly believe that time will prove your innocence and justify our action in the matter. Had I believed you guilty, no power on earth could have induced me to do as I have done."

"Oh, how can I ever repay such kindness?"

"Do not worry about that now. For the present your safety hangs in the balance. Let us hope that

Genevive will return soon, unharmed. You must go now and do not fail to carry out every instruction to the letter."

She had barely ceased talking when excited voices coming from the direction of the road attracted their attention.

"Sh! sh! keep very quiet!" exclaimed Mrs. Pieron in an undertone. "They are on your trail and there is not a moment to be lost. Hide yourself in the shrubbery, and I must fly for the house."

Irving had barely time to secrete himself when a group of horsemen came upon the scene. By this time the rain had ceased and the moon peeked from a rift in the clouds, giving him a splendid opportunity of viewing the oncoming troupe without fear of detection. When within a few feet he was enabled to discern the familiar profiles of some of his old-time friends. He was also at this moment enabled to distinguish among the rabble a gentle feminine voice. "Now, you must all come in for a few moments at least!" it exclaimed. "I know mamma will be delighted to thank you for your very kind assistance."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Irving in an undertone. "Can it be—— Yes, it is Genevive safe and sound!"

At sight of her he was transformed into a new being, the blood pulsated through his veins more rapidly and his brain became more clear to the great necessity of caution. Oh, how he longed to rush forward and clasp her in his arms, how he longed to grasp the hands of those sturdy farmer boys as he had done in bygone days, and hold converse in

the same old mood. He could not for a moment lead himself to become angry with them for the part they had taken in the horrid affair, for well he knew that were they convinced of his innocence no power on earth could ever induce them to betray even the slightest confidence.

They were only misguided fanatics seeking to wreak vengeance upon the one whom they honestly believed to be guilty, and deep down in his manly heart he humbly asked God to forgive them for perpetrating the great sin of which they knew not.

For some time after the little party had entered the house Irving remained in his place of concealment, his head bowed down as if in great sorrow, then walked quietly away in the direction of Aunt Chlo's cabin. He knew every bridle path through the woods, and by taking the numerous short cuts was not long in reaching his destination for the night.

The faithful old colored lady had stood guard the whole evening, patiently awaiting his coming, and when she beheld the form approaching in the darkness could not refrain from calling aloud:

"Is dat yo', honey?"

"Yes, Aunt Chlo, it is I, Irving——" She did not wait for any further explanation, but pulled him into the little room and closed the door.

"Thank goodness, you'se saved, honey boy. I jest knowed she'd do it, 'cause dat girl sho' am a wondah."

"Yes, Aunt Chlo, I owe my very life to her, for had it not been for the clever manner in which she worked her daring scheme I would now be at the

mercy of that misguided mob, composed of those who, in days gone by, were my very best friends, but withal, Aunt Chlo, I have felt it in my heart all along to ask God to forgive them, for 'they know not what they do.' "

"You'se sho' doin' what am right, 'cause de good book done say to 'Fergive 'em, O Lord, for dey knows not what they does.' "

"Yes, you are correct. I had not thought of it in that light before. The quotation had never occurred to mind, but my very soul would rebel at the thought of seeking vengeance, were it possible, even though I had never heard of the word of God. I suppose it is an instinct born within me."

At this moment the sound of approaching horsemen brought the conversation to an abrupt termination, and Aunt Chlo was not long in hustling Irving to a place of concealment, which she had prepared in the attic of the rickety building. And none too soon, for barely had the noise occasioned thereby subsided when a loud rapping at the door again broke the stillness of the night.

Aunt Chlo at first paid no attention to the knocking, and repeated entreaties of the strange visitors, feigning to be sound asleep, but their persistence finally aroused her from the deceptive slumber. She arose, lighted a candle and opened the door. When the light was thrown full upon the crowd she could easily make them out to be a bunch of young rowdies, four in number, who had been terrorizing the neighborhood for some time past. Two of them were the sons of reasonably respectable parents, but were evidently the outcroppings of a thoroughly de-

graded ancestry, while the others were the offspring of a half-breed Osage Indian, John White-eagle by name, who was himself a degenerate and was being looked upon with a growing suspicion by the neighbors near and far as one who might at any time become afflicted with criminal intent.

The young vagabonds had upon this occasion imbibed quite freely, and had no doubt taken a prominent part in the proceedings at the village earlier in the evening.

When their real identity was first disclosed the old colored lady was angered beyond measure.

"What bus'ness am all yo' or'nary white trash got heah dis time o' night, I jest likes to know?" she demanded.

One of the crowd, who was not quite as shaky as the others, acted as spokesman and ventured the following explanation:

"Yer see as how, ole lady, we wuz down (hic) to der settlement ter-night (hic) an' thought as how you would like ter hear der news (hic).

"I doan' want to heah nothin' from yo', yo' good-fer-nothin', or'nary skunk. I tells yo' now, yo' jest bettah move on."

"Oh, yes yer do, auntie (hic), yer know dat angel boy of Brant's wus hung ter-night (hic) fer murderin' de Sampsons."

"What does I care, I tells yo'? I'se done washed my hands ob dat boy. Now, I tells yo' dat yo' all bettah be gwine."

Irving had heard every word of the conversation from his place of concealment, and his very blood was boiling over with rage at the insolent

manner in which the old lady was being addressed. Oh, how he longed to grasp the cowardly wretches and crush them as he would a snake, not alone because he believed that they had participated in the dastardly work of the evening, but his very soul revolted at the thought of feminine abuse. Since childhood, Aunt Chlo had always been willing to lend a helping hand in the hour of need, and he was sorely grieved that circumstances would not permit of his reciprocation in a measure at the present time, but he succeeded in mastering self and calmly awaited the outcome.

When the ruffians were apparently fully satisfied with tormenting the old lady they mounted and rode away, leaving the occupants of the little cabin in quiet and peace once more.

For many long weary days and nights Irving was compelled to remain a prisoner in the crampy garret. The officers were industriously ferreting out every nook and corner for some clue as to his whereabouts, but, thanks to the wise precaution of Genevive, no thought had ever been given to the home of the old negro. The Brant homestead was constantly under surveillance, notwithstanding the fact that the Captain had all along truthfully protested his ignorance of any knowledge of the affair.

Not a soul outside of those directly interested had the least idea of Genevive's having had any hand in the matter, but the wily little soul would not go near Aunt Chlo's cabin until the vigilance of the officers had relaxed to a great extent. In fact, two weeks had elapsed before she even paid a visit to Irving's parents, and then did not impart any in-

formation as to his place of concealment. The parents, although anxiously awaiting the outcome, were willing to abide by their promise to leave the matter entirely in her hands, and did not even make inquiry as to their son's welfare, although they had heard in a roundabout way of the successful jail delivery. They were, of course, quite anxious about the great risks the daring girl was taking, but were overjoyed to know that the plan was succeeding beautifully.

To Irving the days seemed as months and he had almost despaired of ever again being permitted to breathe the pure air of freedom.

"Aunt Chlo," he would say, "do you think that our little adviser has totally deserted us? I could very easily finish the work that she has thus far accomplished by fleeing from the country, but I would so hate to go without the blessed privilege of seeing her again."

"Coase yo' could, yo' good-fer-nothin' boy, but yo' ain't gwine tu do it. Dat little gal done say fer yo' to stay rite heah until she done gone an' say de word, an' heah you'se gwine to stay."

"Very well, auntie, I shall abide peacefully by your decision, and await her coming, but, oh, the agony of suspense is becoming a burden."

Early one morning, about ten days later, Genevive came to Aunt Chlo's home, supposedly on a little mission connected with herself, but her motives were as you might suspect not altogether mercenary. Her mind was well-absorbed with the welfare of another.

Irving had now been a prisoner in the little cot-

tage for some six or seven weeks, and this was the first time that she had even dared pay him a visit, but she had been wide awake to her business, and would not permit herself to do anything which might cast the least suspicion in her direction, no matter how great her desire to be as near him as possible.

She had patiently waited until all efforts at his recapture had been abandoned, then cautiously went about laying plans for getting him completely beyond the reach of danger. Her busy brain had conceived the idea of immediate flight, and when what she deemed the proper time had arrived, lost not a single moment in getting everything in readiness.

In way of consoling Irving, she nerved herself to the task and tried her very best to present the bright side of everything. "Dearest," she said, "this parting will be one of the saddest moments of my short life, but necessity demands the action. You must go, and remember wher'er you go that there is one who will never for a moment cease to think of you, and will work night and day in a noble attempt to fathom the mystery which has so ruthlessly sent her lover adrift to the four corners of the earth, seeking a place of refuge and safety from the babbling tongues of an ever-suspecting humanity. To-night, when darkness falls, I will be awaiting you on the banks of the stream near the old mill dam, until then it is necessary that we say goodbye."

Irving choked with emotion, and could hardly utter a word. "God bless you, sweetheart," he exclaimed, although rather inarticulate. "I will meet

—J.S.F.

you at the mill dam, but only after I have paid a visit to my mother, the best friend on earth, excepting your sweet self."

Genevive did not make reply, but passed quietly out the door, and wended her way homeward, every now and then a tiny tear trickling down her pretty cheek as if to keep time with her hurried step.

All day long Irving remained in a pensive mood, and when darkness settled came forth from his little prison. After bidding Aunt Chlo an affectionate farewell he went straight to the old farm home, risking all for just one last farewell and loving embrace from those precious arms which had fondled him when a mere babe. He left the aged parents in tears, but with a firm belief in his innocence, and with a heart filled to overflowing with sorrow, cautiously made his way to the appointed meeting place.

Genevive had preceded him only a short time, and had everything in readiness for the flight. She had, through the secret aid of her ever-indulgent father, secured a splendid pony for the purpose, which was already at hand, bridled and saddled.

"Here is your conveyance, Irving," she exclaimed. "Mount at once, and make the best of the time allotted, for when daylight comes you must, through the direst necessity, seek shelter in some place of concealment."

"Oh, dearest, like yourself, this is the saddest moment of my life," said Irving. "Each day, as I have learned to know you better and better, to more thoroughly understand your pure, sweet soul, my wicked heart has ached for you—for you alone

——” He gently pressed her to his manly bosom and showered kiss after kiss upon her rosy lips.

“I will go now,” he exclaimed; “but as sure as there is a God in heaven I shall ever remain true, and if perchance the time should ever come, and I sincerely believe it will, when this undeserving blemish shall be washed from my good name, I will return and claim you for my own. Will you await my coming, sweetheart?” “Yes, Irving, forever and ever,” and he straddled his mount and rode slowly away in the darkness, from the almost identical spot which had witnessed the last meeting of Ivan and Cecelia prior to his journey eastward long months before—a wanderer in the wide, wide world, not from choice, but through the direst straits of necessity.

CHAPTER X.

A BROKEN PROMISE.

When Ivan bade his father goodby at the landing and went aboard the boat his soul was filled with remorse. He could not put the horrible scene which he had witnessed a few hours before from his mind. At first he was worried because he had not possessed the manhood to go straight to his father and tell him all, but as the little craft glided smoothly along, the strange objects and faces with which he was brought in contact, helped greatly to diffuse his thoughts and place the previous night's happenings beyond the pale of worry, which to one of his selfish disposition was an easy matter.

The long trip was accomplished on time without a single mishap, and Ivan was at once enrolled at the college as a student in the theological department. He had mustered enough energy to put forth every effort at first, and apply himself thoroughly to the work, but as the days drifted by he became more dilatory, working only enough to keep in hailing distance of the remainder of the class, this being accomplished only through the aid of his natural oratorical ability.

At the very beginning he had taken to music and

here also his natural adaptability stood him in good stead, for he soon mastered the art without the least apparent effort.

The first communication he received from home imparted the information of Irving's arrest and incarceration for the murder of the Sampsons, and while the complex situation naturally worried him a little he consoled himself with the fact that he had been fortunate to escape the accusation, even though his only brother had been drawn into the clutches of the law through the unfortunate part he himself had played in the horrid affair. "I am not guilty," he would muse, "why should I worry? Nor do I believe Irving guilty; but why should I implicate myself when there is not even the slightest suspicion cast in my direction, and besides, if Irving is not guilty, he will have no trouble in establishing his innocence." Theorizing as of old, not caring in the least about the outcome of the matter in so far as Irving was concerned, thinking only of self and how fortunate for him had been the striking resemblance of the twin brother.

For a short while only he remembered Cecelia and their pledges of constancy. Letters were exchanged quite frequently for a while, then he became negligent and would not answer her loving missives for weeks at a time. When taken to task he would invariably attribute the cause of his negligence to the extremely difficult work he had before him. "Each day," he would explain, "I find the lessons more troublesome. They are harder and harder, and almost every moment of my time is occupied." A very plausible story, and one that com-

pletely blinded the unsuspecting girl to the real facts connected with his college career. She had not as yet been initiated into the artful fickle ways of this wide, wicked world, and knew not the meaning of the word deception.

The innocent girl toiled on unceasingly, her mind ever filled with loving thoughts of him, her deft fingers ever busy with the making of numerous handy articles and ornaments that were to adorn their home, thinking ever of him and the future by day, dreaming only of him by night.

The dreadful calamity which had befallen the Brant family was discussed in her presence pro and con, but while she could not believe her sweetheart's brother guilty of such a heinous crime, yet she held aloof from venturing even the slightest opinion in the matter. The strange noises that had been borne to their ears from the old mill on the evening preceding Ivan's departure for the East was constantly being brought to mind as possibly having some connection with the affair, but after Irving's arrest her lips were sealed and she never let drop a single word that might have the least bearing on the case. If Irving could possibly be guilty time would attend to the punishment, if not, that same element would be instrumental in fully establishing his innocence.

The long, weary hours dragged slowly into days, the days into weeks, and the weeks into months, with only an occasional communication from her betrothed, yet Cecelia openly clung to the belief in his constancy, though the short missives did not breathe the same words of love and endearment that had marked the ones written for a few weeks after

his departure. Deep down in her own heart there had long been a growing suspicion that all was not as it should be between them. Why he should become so busily absorbed with his work as to utterly forget his affianced bride was beyond the poor girl's power of comprehension. He could never know how those loving messages had been appreciated; each one had been secretly ensconced within the folds of her bosom to be read and reread twice, yes, thrice, every day. They had been balm to her lonesome soul, and had so helped to pass the long, weary hours. Oh, what could it all mean? Little she knew that her joyous dream of love was soon to have an awakening, and that those beautiful eyes were soon to be opened to the loathsome perfidy of mankind.

One of the neighbor boys had recently returned from the college with the news of Ivan's progress, which was not at all flattering. Thus far he had accomplished little in so far as class grades were concerned, but had gained a name in musical circles, and was being looked upon as one of the coming orators of the day, both accomplishments due to his natural ability and not to any extraordinary effort as a student.

He has changed wonderfully, the young man explained, and has only recently taken to society, Dame Rumor had it that he was looked upon with much favor by the fairer sex, and that his engagement to one of the most prominent society belles, a Miss Clarice Gray, had long since been abandoned as a matter of conjecture, and had taken on the form of reality.

All this unpleasant news, when it first reached the

ears of Cecelia, set her brain to whirling and her poor little heart to aching. All the pleasant dreams of a happy home and loving companion had vanished in a twinkling, her fondest hopes crushed to earth, but she hardened her heart to the trying ordeal, and would not permit the slightest rumor to gain credence of her very undeserving humiliation.

Ere this she had been transformed from the commonplace musings of childhood to a more mature womanhood, and was fast learning the necessity of the adaptation of self to circumstances. She nerved herself to the moment and gave no outward evidence of her first great sorrow, but were it possible to look deep into her soul, a great yawning chasm filled only with an aching void would have no doubt been the direct result of the research.

Although heartbroken, her indomitable spirit lifted her to the highest pinnacle of self possession and she appeared to a better advantage than ever before, seeming to have entirely forgotten the unfortunate love affair, light-hearted and gay amidst the encircling sorrow.

She had become thoroughly convinced that the man whom she had held above all others was, through his wonderful powers of duplicity, playing the double role. She said not a word to any one, not even her mother being taken into her confidence, but hastened to pen him a missive in the tersest manner.

"Dear Sir," it began—

"I have but recently been made acquainted with the deceptive role you are endeavoring to play. My eyes have been opened to your artful, fickle soul, and

while I, duped, innocent girl that I am, have ever remained true to our early pledges, I am now forced to say that all is over. I shall not breathe a word to any one of what you might be pleased to term our little childhood farce, and you may rest assured that through me the world will never know of your infamous perfidy.

"I am pleased to subscribe myself,

"Yours truly,

"CECELIA KEYS."

Although the missive was couched in no uncertain terms and with a certain degree of sarcasm, yet the tone in which it had been written could but denote that there was forgiveness in her heart and on her tongue, and a thorough perusal could not but convince one of its having been written purposely in direct conflict with the feelings of the author.

When the letter first reached Ivan's hands he was greatly surprised and could not for the life of him understand how such information had reached her ears, but he was bound to admit of its correctness. The old mood of theorizing again captured him, and he spent a whole day speculating as to the outcome of the heartless transaction. He led himself to believe that he was only a victim of a silly childhood flirtation, the same pitfall that had ensnared thousands of others, and from which they had emerged without a worldly blemish. Why should he be compelled to abide by a foolish promise when the love he once imagined had entirely vanished? No, he would write the poor, silly child a letter explaining all, and drop the matter from his mind entirely.

Not a slayer of men, but the arch knave in the murder of a human happiness.

When Cecelia received the short letter of explanation, although feeling that all was over, she could not but feel a great sense of joy creeping through her soul, for who knew, it might be possible that he had repented and asked her forgiveness, which would be joyously forthcoming. She hastily opened it and read:

"MY DEAR CECELIA:

"Since coming in contact with this great wide world and her varying hordes of humanity I have learned to know that our little flirtation was only an imaginary love, and I feel that our conjugal happiness, were the little farce to lead to matrimony, would be a total blank, and our wedded life could be nothing more than a life of misery.

"I sincerely trust that you will forgive me if I have, at any time, said or done anything which could cause you pain or sorrow, and I feel that I am well enough acquainted to believe that your forgiving soul will be lenient.

"No, doubt ere this you have also learned to know of the great fallacies of the idle musings of childhood, and will be overjoyed to be disenthralled from the fetters of a rash promise.

"Wishing you a happy future, believe me to be,

"Yours sincerely,

"IVAN."

For a moment the poor, heart-broken creature stood as if transfixed, then tore the letter into frag-

ments and crushed the particles to earth with her tiny heel. "Oh, how could any one be so horribly cruel?" she sobbed. "No soul could have loved with a purer, more sincere passion, yet to no avail. I have doubtless been cast aside to make room within his heart for the love of some gay creature of the world, who in turn will be ruthlessly cast to the rear to make room for further conquests. Oh, this wicked, wicked world. But no matter how insincere he has proven I shall ever remain true to my early vows."

She did not mention a word of the affair to any one, but went about her labors as in the past. Following the receipt of the letter she cried the whole night long, and when morning came her pretty eyes were badly swollen from the incessant strain. Mrs. Keys at once noticed her condition, although she had endeavored to hide her feelings, and at once demanded an explanation. After repeated entreaties she yielded and confided everything in her mother.

"I have loved him, oh, so well, my dear, good mother," she said. "And to think that he could be so heartless and cruel as to forsake me for the flip-pant airs of one who is perhaps more versed in the ways of this wicked world."

"Yes, Cecelia, dear, I am afraid you have loved not wisely but too well. Do not condemn him too severely, for he, too, is but an innocent fledgling, captivated by the ensnaring caprices and whims of society no doubt, but like the petals of the rose, all earthly pleasures will fade away, one by one until in time he, a repentent sinner, will be made to clearly see the error of his way."

The kind words of consolation greatly strengthened her to the situation, and she went about attending to the light cares of the household apparently unconcerned as to the future, yet within her faithful bosom there was a longing hope that Ivan would possibly some time, as the mother had said, see the error of his way and return to make good those sweet promises of childhood, for hers was the love that knew no awakening and no matter how heartless he had proven, she loved him still.

True to her promise, she did not permit one rumor to be set afloat relative to the breach in their love affairs, and the gossiping public were forced to content themselves with surmising and conjecture.

A few weeks later the Keys family were greatly surprised by the announcement from Cecelia of her determination to leave the old home and make her way alone in the world, a plan which not only met with the disapproval of her mother, but from the entire household. But her mind was fully made up, and no amount of persuasion could induce her to change her decision. Each little objection was overruled one by one, until the entire family had been won over by her gentle disposition and subtle argument.

"Time will prove my sincerity of purpose," she would say, "and I really think, my dear, sweet mother need have no fear of the future in so far as I am concerned, for I have, through the perfidy of one long since forgiven, been taught the lesson of a lifetime. I feel that I am eminently fitted for that exalted position in life which God intended that we the weaker sex should fill, but an unkind fate has

decreed otherwise. I know that I could never be happy with another, and feel that my life would be illy spent were I to decide otherwise. My one great desire, under the circumstances, is to give my life to the cause of humanity, to aid in my feeble way in the upbuilding of a depraved and down-trodden people, and I know my dear, sweet adviser will be lenient. Won't you, mother?" And her arms went gently around the mother's neck and her resplendent eyes looked deep into the soul of the patient one who bore her.

"You are so kind and considerate, my child," the mother would say, "how could I possibly do otherwise than to coincide with your views? You are perhaps right. The change would no doubt be beneficial to your poor humiliated soul and entirely absolve you from the unpleasant necessity of almost daily contact with those familiar faces and places that you knew so well before this undeserved mortification was so unjustly brought upon you." Tears came into her eyes as she continued: "It will no doubt help you to forget all. But, my dear child, no matter where duty may call you, do not, I humbly implore you, forget the mother who is left behind, whose heart will follow you wher'er you go, and whose nightly prayers shall be an humble supplication for your welfare and safety." She fell to sobbing, and could proceed no further.

Tears moistened the daughter's eyes as she was pressed closely to the mother's breast, her heart filled to overflowing with filial love.

"My dear, sweet mother, you are so good and kind. Oh, can it ever be possible to fully compre-

hend the depths of a mother's love? No, I shall never forget the dear old home and the loved ones there, and you may rest assured that my visits to the scenes of my childhood will be quite numerous."

But little she reckoned of the treachery of time, and thought not of the old adage, "There is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip."

In a short while her trunk was packed and Cecilia took her departure for the city, and while a few of her old-time friends would venture an occasional inquiry as to her whereabouts, the curt answers which they invariably received soon put an end to their inquisitiveness, and she passed quietly out of their lives.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE ASCENDANCY.

Ivan had never returned to the old home for even a short visit with his parents since the day of his departure, and his letters, to say the most, were rather infrequent, being written usually when in close financial straits, asking for the wherewith to replenish his depleted exchequer. All of this naturally worried the parents a little, but the poor indulgent souls consoled themselves with the belief that everything was for the best, and that his long absence was due to his wonderful adaptability to his studies.

The last week in May a long letter came advising that he had decided to leave school at the close of the term and take up ministerial work at once, but before leaving college he was to be married to one of the fairest creatures of earth, Miss Clarice Gray. "I am, oh, so sorry," the letter ran, that it will be impossible for you to be with us, but we have decided that it will be a very exclusive affair, and only a very few of the immediate relatives have been invited. I do not think it possible for me to come home after marriage, as the trip would necessitate a great expense, and while I have labored indus-

triously to make every end meet, I must say that at the present time I am sorely pressed for funds." He closed the missive by asking for more money in his usual subtle manner. "I wish to settle down at once in one of the larger cities," he said, "and you know my expenses will be quite large, but I believe something like five hundred dollars would be a sufficient amount until I can secure a remunerative position."

For a cause unknown to the parents, he was very adroitly avoiding the necessity of a visit to the old home, and while their eyes were slowly being opened to the fact, yet they accepted the situation as a matter of necessity, and as usual forwarded the required amount by return mail.

The day immediately following commencement he was married, as the papers announced, to Miss Gray, at the bride's home on B. Street.

On his wedding day he was sullen and morose, putting aside all of those frivolous airs which had characterized him of late to become his old self once again. Barely a short hour had elapsed since the ceremony, when he had extricated himself from the babbling throng and wandered alone to a quiet little nook in the garden, a very inviting place. He sat down upon a rustic bench for a little rest, and was soon lost in reverie. An unseen something had, the whole day long, been gnawing at his very soul, which, for the life of him, could not be put away. He could not lead himself to realize that he was that very moment a captive of Hymen, and that he had been permitted to fill a contract that was one of the noblest of the many manifestations of God's good-

ness. His mind wandered back to the old home and — Yes, he was thinking of Cecelia and the sacred pledge that "when his school days were over he would return to her." His iniquitous deeds were thus early in his married life staring him full in the face, and his very soul was beginning to revolt at the thought of his past life. "But it is too late now," he mused. "I must pull myself together and forget all. Let bygones be bygones."

His long absence caused Clarice no little amount of worry. She was greatly piqued at being neglected in this manner, and lost no time in instituting immediate search. She was not long in discovering his place of concealment, as one of the servants was free to advance the information of his whereabouts.

"Why, Ivan, dear, what can be the matter?" she asked.

He awoke from his reverie at once. "I assure you, Clarice, there is nothing the matter. I have only sought this place of seclusion that I might rest awhile and inhale the cool fresh air. I pray you to be seated and share the enjoyment."

"But, Ivan, why are you so sad? This of all times, if you love me as you say you do, should be the happiest moment of your life. Have I done anything that could possibly cause you worry?"

"No, no, Clarice, dear, you have been everything that I could possibly desire, a true, devoted, sweetheart."

"Come, then, Ivan, go with me to the guest chamber. Let us show to the world our happiness," and she led him away to the scenes of enjoyment.

Ivan strove diligently to enter heart and soul into the gayety of the occasion, yet his conscience would not adhere to the call, and he was constantly being confronted with the unwelcome remembrance of the many events of childhood. Surely the repentance of which Mrs. Keys had spoken long months before had begun its mysterious work, yet withal he fully realized that it was too late to correct the error, and he was fully determined to, in a measure, atone for the past, by striving with all his might to make her happy, whom he had sworn before Almighty God to love, cherish, and protect. If possible, she should never know of his past life.

With the money furnished by his parents he established a little home in the city of ———, and accepted the pastorate of one of the smaller churches at a very nominal salary. From the very beginning he was a raging success. His wonderful oratorical ability, coupled with the smattering knowledge he had acquired of the Word of God in his one short year at school, at once made him the ideal of each one of his parishioners. His pretty young wife aided very materially in the work, and with the assistance of a few of the more faithful they were not long in bringing the church from a state of chaos which had long since existed, into one of the most promising and hard working religious bodies of the great city. His name and fame spread rapidly in the religious world and it was not long until his services were in great demand at many of the most noted religious gatherings. His sermons were portrayed in the most forceful and logical manner, and he lent every effort to the art of making and

retaining good and sincere friends, whose services were ever at his beck and call. Not one of the little congregation but had accepted him as a model and accorded him that high esteem which should characterize the life of every high-minded, sincere teacher of the Word of God. None of them knew a word of his past life and no one seemed to care. They were only happy in the belief that they had at last succeeded in their long cherished ambition of securing the services of one who in every way seemed eminently fitted to fill what they were pleased to believe the most exalted position within the power of man. The faithful little flock were, as a rule, industrious, hard working people, not over prosperous, which necessarily meant that the contributions were not large, yet Ivan and his pretty wife were enabled to live quite comfortably from the meager salary, and seemed perfectly happy and contented; truly adhering to the creed; that no good guardian of the Sacred Word of God should permit the greed for gold to o'ershadow his conception of his capabilities for good.

When he was at last settled he wrote often to the old folks at home and received many kind letters of encouragement in return, but never a word was exchanged relative to the happenings of days gone by. Notwithstanding this fact however, Ivan found it impossible to resist the great power of Mind over matter and that old memory still clung tenaciously to him.

He was courteous and kind to a marked degree, with every one with whom he came in contact, and although he had committed some almost unpardon-

able blunders, yet he worked hard to atone for those sins, and strove diligently to point out the straight and narrow path of righteousness to all.

But curiously enough, our sins will eventually find us out, "For God searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins of man," and although Ivan had imagined that he was really doing penance, but he had not yet learned to know the real meaning of the word. He had never as yet suffered real humiliation, and while he had felt a sorrow within his own heart, the world had not yet been made acquainted with his grievous sins and the finger of scorn had not yet been cast in his direction.

He was at last brought to a complete understanding of the trying situation under the most peculiar circumstances.

For some weeks a grand union meeting had been in progress in one of the most densely populated districts of the great city, and the wonderful oratorical ability which had previously brought him into prominence, gained for Ivan an important place in the foremost ranks of the most noted ecclesiasts. He was looked upon as one of the great exhorters of the day, and through his wonderful powers of magnetism was bringing hundreds of God's lambs into the fold. Night after night he would admonish those who had gone astray to turn from their wicked ways and seek the glorious Kingdom of God. The papers throughout the land had taken up the echo and were lauding him to the sky, as one who had mysteriously come among them bearing the word of God, preaching salvation to all who cared to listen, sowing the seed broadcast and

reaping a bountiful harvest. Thousands upon thousands, the paper stated, had listened to this wonderful man and hundreds had been turned away nightly. The good people had donated to the work with a surprising liberality; the amount alone collected from the services conducted by the Rev. Mr. Brant would no doubt run far into the hundreds of dollars. The old, old story, "Measuring a man's capabilities for good by his ability to earn money."

For many weeks the meeting continued and under Ivan's masterful leadership the number of conversions were becoming manifold. From the very first time he occupied the pulpit he had been attracted by a heavily veiled figure, who almost nightly occupied the same seat in the vast audience, but who had never, so far as he was able to discern, disclosed her identity. He at once became interested in the very attentive listener and made inquiry as to who she might be, but no one seemed to know who the mysterious stranger was or from whence she had come. He at last became so deeply concerned that he made bold to engage her in conversation, but his boldness elicited no further information, other than she was a working girl in the city. He was, of course, very profuse with his expressions of gratification at the great interest she had thus far displayed in the meeting and "I trust," he said, "If you have not already given your heart to God, that you will find our meetings a source of comfort and that you may be greatly benefited thereby," saying which he turned and walked quickly away, mingling with the great crowd of his admirers. But no matter where he went he

was besieged by the thought of the strange lady. He could not possibly put her from his mind. That peculiarly attired image was ever before him.

On this particular evening Mrs. Brant, who was almost an inseparable companion, had felt a slight indisposition and remained at home, while her husband, who was ever in search of physical exercise, had walked alone to fill his appointment, and after the above mentioned self-encouraged interview, he hastily excused himself from the throng of admirers upon the ground that he desired to return to his wife as soon as possible. He hurriedly extricated himself from the swaying sea of humanity and walked leisurely down a dimly lighted street in the direction of his home, his mind busily absorbed —. No, not with home and home ties, nor with the splendid success of the great revival, but again of the old home; of those places that were ever dear in childhood. The reminiscences of bygone days were again adrift, floating upon the great sea of memory. How plainly he could see the old mill dam where in those days he had so often sat by the side of Cecelia, the old time sweetheart. The faithful one whose one great ambition in life had been cast as chaff to the wind by the reckless promise of a ——— yes, a cowardly cur. And I—I am the guilty one, he mused. “I wonder where she is now living?” And Irving, my only brother, I wonder if he is still alive? O guilty wretch that I am, why did I not possess the manhood to tell everything upon that fatal night? even though I had been compelled to bear the stigma of disgrace that has befallen Irving. I know that he

is innocent, and I feel that he has been made a wanderer in this wide, wicked world through my unpardonable cowardice. O that I were able to atone for the past. Would to God that I could live it all completely over. How vastly different would the course of life be run. But it is too late now. Yes, too late. I have fervently asked God for forgiveness and had begun to think that the old things were cast completely from my mind, but to-night that old infinite something is again nagging at my heart and I almost feel that my efforts at repentance have proven futile. Yet, like Peter and Paul, I must be content to watch and pray, and strive diligently on in an earnest endeavor to reap that grand reward promised to those who truly repent."

Thus he mused as he wandered almost aimlessly along. His mind was a total blank, in so far as the present surroundings were concerned, yet that tireless and silent instinct was guiding him aright, even though he had selected the less frequented path.

As he was crossing a busy thoroughfare within a few blocks of his home he was attracted by the sound of carriage wheels close at hand, and looked up just in time to see a heavy vehicle being driven at a furious pace, and bearing down directly upon him. He had not the barest possible fraction of a moment in which to extricate himself from the perilous position and before he had any possible chance to realize the situation was knocked violently to the pavement.

At this hour of the night there were very few pedestrians abroad, especially in this part of the city, and as the heavy cab with its load of revelers

and bleared eyed, grog-besotted driver rolled madly on, the prostrate form was left lying as it had fallen.

How long he lay in this position Ivan never knew, but when consciousness first began to return he was aware of the presence of a personality which in his present state of mind seemed as an angel bearing him away to an unknown somewhere. During his first rational moments he could feel a soft feminine hand gently stroking his hair, and once he was almost sure that he could feel the imprint of an affectionate kiss upon his forehead. All of which he afterward figured as an hallucination. After awhile the eyes opened wide and he was enabled to more clearly discern the strange faces gathered around, and the Good Samaritan who had so kindly ministered in the hour of trouble, was none other than the mysterious veiled stranger of the evening, who from some mysterious cause had happened upon the spot just at the moment when the accident occurred, and hastened to his relief. She had carefully dragged him to a place of safety and lost no time in summoning assistance. She quickly returned to his side, and with his matted head gently resting in her lap, nursed him back to life, consciousness returning just at the moment when assistance arrived.

The wound was only slight, and with the return of consciousness his former strength returned and he was soon on his feet. His first thought was of his gentle protector, but before he even had time to thank her for the almost unprecedented kindness she had quietly disappeared, going as she had come.

With the kindly assistance of two of the gentlemen who had come at the maiden's behest, Ivan was enabled to walk slowly to his home. At the gate he thanked them very courteously for their kindness and bade them good-night.

The morning following the papers came out with a lengthy account of the accident that had befallen the distinguished Rev. Mr. Brant, going so far as to say that his recovery from the shock had no doubt been hastened by the valuable service rendered by an unknown lady who chanced to be passing at the moment the accident occurred. But the curious part of the affair the papers stated, was the disappearance of the unknown lady immediately after consciousness returned, leaving not the slightest trace of her identity, although the Rev. Brant had been more than anxious to meet her personally and thank her for her very kind assistance.

How well they had hit upon the truth. For Ivan did wish to meet her personally, and was more anxious now than ever to discover her identity. But our lady of mystery had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed her up, and the problem was still unsolved.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR IS HARD.

Ivan returned to his home only to find his wife in a delirious state of mind. The slight indisposition which had attacked her earlier in the evening had rapidly developed into a raging typhus. The best medical assistance was at once summoned and all of the remedies known to the science were freely administered, but to no avail; each day found her gradually growing weaker, until the tenth morning when the precious soul passed quietly to its Maker, surrounded by those dear friends and neighbors whose tireless vigilance had not relaxed for a single moment since the beginning of the end.

During their short married life Ivan had never learned to know the real worth of a loving companion, and true to the old adage, "You'll never miss the water till the well runs dry," did not realize until it was too late. Like the artist who views with a critical eye the many beauties of nature, looks upon them in all their glory, yet at the moment he is enraptured with their resplendent loveliness and cannot arrive at a proper knowledge of their real grandeur. But in after hours, when the spell has been broken as it were, when calmness reigns supreme and his better judg-

ment asserts itself, the scenes which have been witnessed are again brought to memory and he is enabled to view them in their true light, to pick out the most beautiful and classify them as he would a first attempt at sketching. So it was with Ivan. After the remains of Clarice had been laid at rest, the flesh to earth and the spirit to the God who gave it, then it was that Ivan realized for the first time, her true worth. The little home seemed utterly deserted, there were no loving hands to prepare those tiny delicacies for his sake, no loving voice to cheer him on and speak kind words of consolation and encouragement in the long hours of trial and tribulation. Yes, he now realized it all, but again after it was too late.

The night following interment Ivan sat for long hours in his little cottage, his head buried in his hands as of yore, but the old mood of theorizing was extant, and he felt for almost the first time the real pangs of sorrow. He had really begun to see himself in the true light and to know that he could not successfully withstay the limelight of inspection, were it turned in his direction. His own soul was not the one to pattern after and he wondered, as does the author, if it were not better to first ferret out the little flaws in the architectural work of one's own feeble attempt at character building, rather than lead a life of deception, which he could now plainly see had characterized his short race. He had reached the topmost pinnacle of fame in the profession which his parents had mapped out for him early in life, but was not at all satisfied with the result. "Truly what doth it profit a man if he

gain the whole world and lose his own soul" came flitting through his mind, and he felt low, mean and contemptible, for had he not gained fame and a name in this world through the practice of deception? Thus he mused out the night and when morning came again he passed the early hours strolling quietly in his pretty flower garden, the one that he and Clarice had planted and cared for so tenderly. The neighbors and friends called to offer words of consolation, but while he thanked them very cordially, their offerings were soon forgotten.

A week later Ivan sent in his resignation as pastor of the little church, and while the congregation were sorely grieved at his decision, yet they were those good indulgent souls who thought everything for the best, and the resignation was accepted. Some time previous a more prosperous congregation had offered him the pastorate of one of the larger churches up town at an advanced salary, which at first he was loath to accept, but the sad events of the past few weeks had so worked upon his weakened nature, that at the present time he did not hesitate one moment in taking the first great step in the descent of the ladder of fame. He, the very individual, who only a few short weeks before had stood before a vast multitude and denounced in no uncertain terms, the hoarding of wealth, proclaimed money as the root of all evil and fashion as a mockery, had forsaken the little band who had stood so nobly by him in the days of adversity and through sickness and death, to accept the pastorate of a more stylish church at a higher salary.

This step was the beginning of the fall from

grace, as it were. All through his short married life Ivan had made a noble effort at repentance, and had felt a great sorrow within his own heart for the many sins he had committed, but, like the common run of people, he was only human, and he could see that his life thus far had been a great chain of errors, which he had attempted, only feebly, to correct.

Psychologically speaking his will power was greatly at fault, and no matter the presentiment as to right or wrong, this faculty could never be properly brought into action. It was the weak spot in his physical makeup. It seemed as a ship cast loose upon the ocean to wander whither the surging waves were pleased to carry it. Thus it had been through Ivan's whole life. He had early in life been sent adrift among the great surging sea of humanity and was drifting aimlessly with the tide. He knew right from wrong, yet, like thousands, yea, millions of others, the flesh had mastered mind, and the longing for those gay and frivolous pastimes, overruled the belief that our conscience should be our compass.

He had gradually fallen into the old ways and seldom found time to write his parents. Society had taken him in with a glad hand and he was Master of Ceremonies at most of the functions connected with church affairs, either religious or social, and the social columns of almost every sheet in town was teeming with the doings of the Reverend Mr. Brant and his wealthy congregation.

Thus it was that the parents were enabled to keep in touch with the negligent boy, and to obtain par-

tial information as to his progress in his profession, but there came a time when those same columns sent out messages that brought tears of sorrow to the old gray-headed father and mother.

From the very day that he had decided upon the change in his field of labor, Ivan's life had undergone a wonderful transformation. His proud spirit prompted him to dress quite showy, which was greatly in his favor in gaining the confidence and good will of his parishioners, most of whom were wealthy; bedecked with a greater amount of riches than with the grace of God. His manner and style of preaching was made very acceptable to the great majority of the congregation. He had studied them thoroughly and made it a special point to eliminate anything from his sermons which might in any way incur the displeasure of even the less righteous, using his natural ability and tact at this time, seemingly for the express purpose of accumulating the Almighty Dollar. His mild denunciations set well with society and he was taken into its midst with the glad hand of fellowship. In other words, he had become a society pet, parading under the guise of a Minister of the Gospel. His soul had not as yet become imbued with the proper conception of his own capabilities for good. The nights were usually spent in some mild sort of revelry, while the days were given up to sleep and a feeble effort at mastering sermons suitable to the congregation for next Lord's day and night, which for Ivan in his present state of being was no little task, for he did not wish to step heavily upon the toes of those who were paying the price he now coveted so much.

Among other accomplishments he was a musician of rare ability, and his efforts were in great demand at the numerous musicales given by the more talented of the congregation. In this manner he was thrown almost constantly into the companionship of the female contingent, which fact alone was no doubt the ultimate cause of another great step in the rapid descent of the ladder of fame.

For some months after the change in pastorates things moved along nicely, especially so for Ivan. His labors were not at all arduous and he led a life of elyesian bliss, in so far as outward appearances were concerned, but there was a strong vein of wickedness underneath it all which was gradually cropping out, and the busy-bodies were not long in making the discovery. Dame Rumor had set society agog and the excitement occasioned thereby was at fever heat, among the ladies especially. Mrs. Jones had remarked to Mrs. Strong, on the quiet, of course, that Mrs. Bryant had told Sister Ferguson that in her opinion the new minister was showing partiality toward Sister Benson, and that their relations were becoming altogether improper; a deathly "cross my heart and hope to die" secret which spread rapidly. As is usually the case in distributing the news of an affair of this kind, all were very slack on truth and veracity, each successive holder apparently working upon their imagination to such an extent as to deem it advisable to add a little to what they had already heard and make the gossip more sensational.

For some time things moved along in this manner, the members becoming colder and colder to-

ward Ivan. He could not help but notice the trend of affairs, and well knew the cause of the action on the part of the congregation. He was constantly aware of his own wrong-doing but could not resist the temptation to dive deeper into the intricate depths of sin, and kept up the clandestine proceedings which had been the prime origin of the conditions now existing. It is a fact that the more powerful and influential the guilty one in an affair of this kind, the broader seems the scandal, and this was no exception to the rule. The scandal-mongers were extraordinarily busy, and when the break finally came and Ivan was forced to resign at the urgent request of the board of trustees, the papers dwelt long and loud upon the great society breach which had nearly disrupted the church, and heralded the news broadcast throughout the land.

Another link had been welded in the great chain of errors, and it seemed that Ivan had begun to show an utter disregard for his spiritual welfare.

When thoroughly convinced of his wife's improper relations with the minister, Benson at once instituted damage proceedings and a litigation was soon pending, which at once began the undermining of Ivan's storehouse of wealth, and the little fortune, the result of his efforts in the past few months, rapidly melted away. When all was gone he collected his few personal belongings and moved into a very unpretentious little cottage far out in the suburbs of the city, presumably to be as far away from the scenes of his very recent triumphs and more recent tribulations, as possible. For awhile he lived in almost solitary confinement, hav-

ing no intercourse with the world at large, existing altogether upon the meager amount he could realize upon his own personal effects, until the last earthly belonging was the threadbare clothes upon his back. The miserable pittance he had received at the pawnshop was soon exhausted and he was compelled to go in search of employment, but his was not the hands to do hard labor, and his energies were turned toward doing the very things he had but recently denounced, in order to obtain the necessities of life. "Get money. Get it any way you can," was becoming his slogan. He was evidently imbued with the idea of the rogues' translation of the quotation "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," which sounded thus: "Do others or they'll do you." The hours were spent in devising means whereby the ready cash could be obtained in the easiest possible manner without openly disobeying the laws of the land. He had also taken to strong drink, and was fast throwing morality to the winds. He had endeavored to put all of the old friends from his mind, even so far as to forget the poor old gray-headed mother who had nourished him when a mere babe in arms, and had so anxiously looked forward to the time when her boy should make for himself a name which would forever be emblazoned upon the great scroll of honor, but instead, she had been confronted with the bitter disappointment of his speedy downfall, since which time she had lost all trace of their erring son.

He gradually drifted from bad to worse until he

had become a typical street loungeur, spending the days in sleep, while the nights were given up to revelry and debauchery. He had fallen and great was the fall thereof. The ascent of the ladder of fame had been rapid but the fall therefrom was even more rapid, until at the present time he was at the very bottom, but through the exercising of his natural musical ability he was existing, yes, shameful to say, he was eking out a miserable existence in the lowest hell-holes of iniquity, where the gaudily painted harlots were wont to ply their nefarious vocation, sappers as it were at the very foundation of human existence.

For a short while the gaiety of this manner of life caused him to forget all, but the fascination soon wore away, and as the old life was hurled back at him he became resentful and boastful. Ready at all times to resent any manner of questioning as to his style of living, and boastful of what he had once been, and of his ability to earn a living in various ways were he so inclined. He had drunk deep of the dregs of degradation and had arrived at one of the most critical points in life. He cared not whether he lived or died.

Late one evening when the shop windows were all closed for the night and the streets were deserted but for the occasional rattle of carriage wheels carrying homeward some late revelers, or perhaps some of the more aristocratic of the sporting gentry, Ivan wandered alone into the "Tenderloin" district of the great city, where the glimmering red lights, Messengers of the Devil, hanging in the most conspicuous places, were slowly but

surely guiding the wayfaring man adown the broad road to Hell.

From brothel to brothel he strolled, stopping at each one just long enough to warm the hearts and perhaps bring a few thoughts of home to the dissipated denizens with sweet strains of music, collecting a few glittering shekels for his efforts to please.

When the usual rounds were completed and an inventory taken of the evening proceeds, he found that he had collected barely enough to pay the rent for the month which was past due, on the lowly little cottage which he called home. For a moment he lingered in deep thought, then moved on and entered a low drinking establishment, one of the most disreputable in the great city, the red-nosed, blear-eyed habitues evidencing the fact of its damnable character. Just one more little drink thought Ivan and he would stroll on homeward, but the moochers, everyone of them lost no time in getting acquainted with the quite respectable looking individual, and the few dollars with which he intended paying his honest debts, were soon spent buying drinks for the miserable bunch of inebriates, who so deftly patted him on the back and proclaimed him a good fellow. As long as the cash lasted he was one of their very best friends, but when the supply was exhausted, their friendship vanished, and they readily forsook him for the excitement of the card table, or the pleasures of a short nap on the various boxes and chairs promiscuously scattered about. Sleeping off the "jag" preparatory to another descent upon the good graces of some other victim.

As Ivan walked out of the dingy little room and started homeward he began, for the first time, to realize what a beastly fool he had been. His last cent had been squandered for drink, not merely for self, but for the silly flattery of a few idle loungers, who in return for his kindness would no doubt rifle his pockets and leave him to die, were they to find him struggling and helpless by the wayside.

He walked on and on, not noticing whither he was going until his attention was attracted by a pretty little park at the side of the street. A rudely constructed seat offered a very inviting place to rest his tired limbs and he lost no time in accepting of its hospitality. He gazed in every direction but not a soul was in sight. The park he recognized as being in the most respectable quarter of the city. In the deathlike stillness he was soon lost in deep thought, the meditation being only disturbed by the chimes of a distant clock, pealing out the hour of midnight. "O what a fool I have been," he mused; "it would have no doubt been better had I never left the old home. My old time friends, where are they? I feel confident that they would not even recognize me were I to meet them face to face upon the street. My life has been a complete failure and I have only made a mockery of the splendid opportunities allotted me. Would to God that I could die and forget it all. I have at last come to the lower level. No home, no friends, no money. What is there to live for after all?"

He was actually contemplating self-destruction. "I will end it all," he mused, "and now——now!" he exclaimed aloud. In his pocket he carried a little

derringer which had been found only that morning in the attic of the cottage where he resided, and with this surly messenger of death he proceeded to carry out the dastardly thought. He pointed it toward his temple and pulled the trigger. At the moment the loud report rang out upon the air an officer, who had witnessed the young man's actions, sprang upon the scene and endeavored to strike the weapon from the hands of the suicide, but apparently his efforts had been futile, as the prostrate form appeared to be perfectly lifeless. An ambulance was hastily summoned and the body conveyed to the morgue for identification.

Apparently the ending of a life poorly spent.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FAITHFUL SHALL BE REWARDED.

Time as elsewhere sped swiftly by in the settlement of St. Charles. The festivities of a long, cold winter were drawing quietly to a close and the coming of the brilliant hued song birds marked the advent of another spring. More than two years had passed since the shocking affair which had so completely upset the community, and the episode had passed from the minds of nearly all save those immediately concerned.

Since the news which had reached their ears late in the fall of Ivan's wrong-doing and his ultimate retirement from church affairs. Mrs. Brant had been in a very delicate condition. Not a word of his whereabouts from that day to this had they ever heard, but the poor faithful soul found it in her heart to pray nightly, yea, almost hourly, asking God to care for and protect her wandering boys, both of whom were now adrift somewhere in the world, one from choice, the other from necessity. Yet the faithful mother could draw no line of distinction. They were both her offspring and she bore for each that same precious mother's love. If either of them had perchance erred, God would at-

tend to the punishment, or grant the reward for what good deeds either of them may have accomplished.

Aside from Mrs. Brant's failing health there had been very little change in the old home. The Captain had, of course, aged a little, but with the possible exception of a few extra gray hairs he looked almost as sprightly and young as ever. He toiled on unceasingly, laying by a nest egg for a rainy day as he was pleased to term it, or when the subject of his working so hard was broached by some interested friend, he would quite frequently attribute the cause of his action wholly to the fact of his one great desire to leave the children in comfortable circumstances, or as he would sometimes say, "Now I might die before mother and I want to leave her an ample abundance of this world's goods."

When Brant would mention the names of either of the boys in the presence of others there was almost invariably a knowing silence, which he could not help noticing. But no matter what others thought his unswerving faith in his own household could not be shaken. In way of trying to console Mrs. Brant, he would sometimes say, "We know, mother, that Irving is innocent of the crime which has been laid at his door, and even though Ivan could have possibly gone astray, there is yet ample time to reform. Boys, you know, will be boys, and thousands of young men sow their wild oats first, then settle down to the life of a useful and respected citizen. No, though others may see fit to censure them, let us hope and pray for them.

There will be a lull in the storm some day and the golden rays of sunshine will peep forth from a clear sky more resplendent than ever. We can only hope for the time, and I do not think it will be long until we can welcome the boys, *our boys*, back to the parental hearthstone. So let us keep up courage, dear sweetheart."

The poor soul feasted upon this one happy thought and was only sustained through the long tiresome winter just passed by the implicit confidence she bore her children. A characteristic which could but bring sunshine into the lives of hundreds and hundreds of anxious fathers and mothers were they to adhere strictly to its precepts.

The rolling stone gathers no moss it is true,
As it glides down the pathway of life,
Not Gold, but God's goodness to me and to you,
Will count us all winners at the end of the strife.

As God has seen fit to repose the utmost confidence in us, so should our actions be governed, especially toward our own household.

Genevieve Pierron was the same vivacious young being as of yore. She was accustomed to attending most of the parties and entertainments given in the settlement and was the acknowledged queen of society. Her suitors were numerous, and her hand had been sought in marriage by a great many of the most prominent young men of the surrounding community. Her fame as a beauty had even extended as far as the now prosperous City of St. Louis, and she had formed the acquaintance of quite a number

of wealthy young residents, who vied strongly with each other in a fruitless attempt at winning her affections. But she showed no favors and treated all with the same degree of cordiality and respect. However, for the past year her preference for the companionship of young Charley White-Eagle had been very marked, and the neighbors and friends had begun to talk the matter over quite freely, especially that element which is to be found in most every community attending to everybody's business except their own. They could not possibly reason why the young lady's parents should permit of such action when they were well aware of the young man's reputation for dishonesty and immorality.

The same condition of affairs were in existence those days as some which so plainly characterize the present-day generation, and which will no doubt exist "Yesterday, to-day and forever." But it is only human to err and most everybody we presume makes the same sad mistake of condemning others for their wrongdoing before the wrongs of self are righted. But it was ever thus, and the condemnation we heap upon the shoulders of others can but add to the long list of accounts upon the debit side of the great ledger of life.

A great many of the more prominent ladies of the community were greatly perplexed at the condition of affairs. In fact, so much so that they took it upon themselves to call an indignation meeting with the avowed intention of publicly denouncing the unworthy actions of young White-Eagle, thinking in this manner to convey to the Pierron family

what they deemed the general consensus of opinion with reference to their daughter's welfare.

The meeting was called in due time and assembled at the home of Mrs. Ross, but their efforts were destined to come to naught. Their deliberations were hardly begun when they were interrupted by the appearance upon the scene of the very object of their ungainly procedure. When Genevieve entered, a deathlike stillness pervaded the whole room. They were caught as rats in a trap and their conscience smote them terribly, but every one of them was determined to make the best of the situation, and in a deceptive manner began at once to shower praises upon the pretty maiden which had but recently been the great source of so much worry. "W'y you do look so sweet in that new calico dress," exclaimed Mrs. Ross. "Law sakes alive, how it do become your pretty face," chimed in another, while like assertions came from the mouth of almost every one of the party.

But Genevieve paid not the slightest attention to their silly flattery. She had come among them merely upon an invitation of self and was not long in making them acquainted with the nature of her mission.

"My dear good people," she began, "you whom I would feign have as the grateful recipients of my everlasting friendship, only a few hours since I was, fortunately, made acquainted with the purpose of your secret meeting, and have come to you in the guise of what I sincerely ask you to accept as an humble servant of God, seeking aid. I have

just come from the miserable hut of John White-Eagle, and it is with great sorrow that I report the family in destitute circumstances. The father, who as you well know, has been a helpless invalid for the past year, has just passed away, leaving an open confession of his many sins, but, thank God, his last breath was a fervent prayer for forgiveness. At his father's bedside the son Charley has promised to lead a better life, and I sincerely believe the promise will be fulfilled. The family are in need of immediate assistance, and under the existing circumstances, don't you think it were well that this very unnecessary proceeding be postponed and you resolve yourselves into a body of co-workers with God for the welfare of humanity?"

Again a deathlike stillness fell upon the assembled hosts. The brave, bold band of busybodies had suffered a scathing rebuke at the hands of the mild mannered maiden who had, until a short time previous, unknowingly been the chief object of such ungodly proceedings. But the blow had been dealt in such a manner that none could take offense, albeit every one of them felt the pangs of humiliation very keenly.

The meeting was speedily adjourned without the least show of formality. Each participant had been taught a valuable lesson in self-government and were no doubt converts to the Old German Philosopher's way of theorizing: "De longer as we live de more we find it by shiminy oud."

Suffice it to say, that the body of old man White-Eagle received a most decent sepulture, and the good people from far and near, as soon as they

were made acquainted with the family's wretched poverty, gratuitously contributed to the needs of the poor unfortunates.

Through the cool, keen judgment of a young girl, those who were actually endeavoring to look after her welfare had been brought face to face with their own duty toward God and their fellow-man and were the very first ones to lend a helping hand in the sad hour of distress.

True to his promise, the young man, after the death of his father, strove diligently to walk uprightly in the narrow path of righteousness, and lent every effort toward the care of his widowed mother and the younger children, but the intimacy which had so long existed between him and Genevieve began to wane at once and the good people wondered at the change. Not one but what were willing to give the brave young heart credit for the act of charity, and they attributed the change in the young man wholly to her teaching, but why, in the beginning had she taken such an interest in the family's welfare? The fact that she had so kindly ministered to their wants in the hour of need was not so marvelous within itself, but the knowledge of their intimacy antedating the beginning of White-Eagle's last illness and before the family had even come to realize their wretched condition, offered abundance of food for conjecture.

But the ever restless public were destined to live for some time longer without the least knowledge of Genevieve's motives. The time soon came, however, when the secret could be kept no longer, and a great sensation was created when the whole story

was unfolded. Excitement ran at fever heat and the whole countryside from far and near gathered at the village, where the very remarkable affair was discussed pro and con.

Genevieve, true to her promise, had labored for the past two years, almost night and day, guided only by her own quick intuition and the kindly advice of the faithful and indulgent mother, trying to ferret out the mystery surrounding the murder for which her sweetheart stood accused. It is at least an unwritten law that the faithful should be rewarded, and this was especially true in Genevieve's case, for she now had the coveted prize almost within her grasp.

She had all along surmised that John White-Eagle might possibly know something of the horrid affair and had played upon his good graces to such an extent that she soon readily became the only real confidant that he had ever known.

When at last he became afflicted with a fatal illness, she spent long hours at his bedside picturing out the many good things of life, and of the wonderful promises of the life to come. As the end drew near and the old fellow was rapidly being brought face to face with his Maker, the wicked heart underwent that peculiar transformation and he poured out the story of his life in the ears of his gentle benefactor. In a feeble voice he told of many wicked deeds for which he would have to account, a goodly number of which had been laid at his door, but more of which he had never been suspected. As he neared the end of the long story he stopped suddenly and looked squarely into Gen-

Genevieve's pretty eyes. "Now, girl," he said, you have been awful good to me an' I'm goin' to tell you somethin' that I knows will make yer feel good, for I kind 'a wants to do somethin' to pay you fer your goodness." Again he stopped for a moment, then continued, while Genevieve sat with wide open mouth ready to grasp every word. "That boy uv Brant's ain't guilty uv murderin' the Sampsons, an' I'm goin' ter give you the whole truth of the worst thing I ever done. I knows I ain't got long ter live an' I'm proud ter do somethin' ter make you happy." Genevieve sat as if spellbound while the old fellow proceeded: "My pal, a full-blood Osage Indian, an' me done fer the old man. We wuz drunk at the time and after it wuz all over, we went down to the old mill to divide the money. We quarreled, then fought. I seed it wuz either his life or mine. Now you can see who lived to tell the story. In the northwest corner uv the cellar under the old mill you will find a big pile uv rock. Turn them over and by diggin' you will find the skeleton uv the man I killed in that awful fight. My God, girl, I kin almost see it all over now as I lays here with death starin' me in the face. Yes, girl, I'm awful sorry fer what I've done an' I'm goin' ter ask God ter fergive me. Won't you pray fer me? Oh, yes the box—— the——" but his voice failed him and he fell gently back upon the pillow. A gentle smile played over his face and he appeared as one relieved of a great burden. Genevieve sat motionless. That for which she had toiled and worked so long had come at last. Tears of joy mingled with tears of sadness, and she knelt by the

bedside and offered up a prayer for the welfare of the fast departing soul. She could hardly await the hour when the result of her untiring efforts should be made known, but she patiently bided her time and watched and waited with the poor stricken family until the spirit had taken its flight.

As soon as the remains were laid at rest Genevieve went straight to her father and told him all. He was at once deeply interested and in a very short time had enlisted the sympathy and aid of several of the neighboring men in making a tour of investigation. They, of course, realized the possibility of the old man's statement to Genevieve being rather incoherent, and their knowledge of the affair was to be kept a profound secret until such time when their assertions could be fully substantiated by unquestionable evidence.

Late at night the little party went forth from the Pierron home, their movements shrouded in the deepest mystery. Genevieve led the way and they made a broad detour in reaching their destination, in order to evade any possibility of meeting with any acquaintance which would no doubt be greatly surprised at the rather odd looking procession and lead them into a subject which for the present they were loath to discuss.

A long time since quaint rumors of the old mill being infested with ghosts had gained credence within the minds of the plain country folk, and its confines had not been graced with the footstep of any human being, for perhaps years. Strange and weird stories had been circulated with reference to the spectral forms and apparitions which had been

witnessed by many who had chanced to be passing late at night, until at the present time none cared to go near it, even detouring for miles in order to avoid the necessity of passing the premises after sundown.

But with all of these facts well in mind Genevieve did not hesitate one moment. She pushed bravely on, ready to defy man or Devil in the conquest of evidence which would forever erase the stigma of disgrace which had so blighted the fair name of the man she loved.

As they emerged upon the river road directly in front of the old structure it presented a very ghostlike appearance with its very irregular bulk plainly silhouetted against the clear evening sky. The men drew back in fear, but the faithful one was not to be deterred in her purpose. "What," she exclaimed, "you are not for turning back now? You have certainly not let your courage fail you just at the critical moment? Come on, follow me. Our fear should be neither of man or Devil, but of God, and when our lives are lived correctly we need have no fear of him." The brave spirit inspired new courage within their hearts and they did not hesitate one moment longer.

As they entered the old rickety building, vermin of every description went scampering about, which caused a cold shiver to pulsate through their whole being. But they did not falter. Their candles were lighted and they descended the creaky old steps leading to the stone cellar underneath. A strange and weird spectacle met their gaze. The heavy timbers supporting the upper structure were

fast going to decay and were covered with a dense fungus growth, while the rocks were one solid covering of slime and moss.

They hesitated for a moment only, then proceeded with their ghastly work. In the corner designated by the old man a large pile of loose stones evidenced the truthfulness of his assertion. The men at once set to work and within a short time the stones were all removed to another corner. Fortunately, they had hit upon the exact spot and ere a half dozen shovels of dirt had been removed they were confronted with the ghastly, grinning skeleton, and resting directly underneath the head was the iron bound box, which they at once recognized as the Sampson treasure box, the one of which old man White-Eagle had tried so hard to tell.

The discovery, although just what they expected, struck terror to the hearts of every one of them. Their hair stood straight and a frigidity likened almost unto a polar temperature, seemed to permeate the atmosphere.

They did not care to look longer upon the gruesome spectacle and at once beat a hasty retreat.

Poor Genevieve, although badly frightened at first, soon regained her former composure and hastened homeward with her father. Once under the shelter of the parental roof she flew to her mother's arms as when a mere child, there on the faithful mother's breast to sob out the story of her great good joy.

No troubled slumbers for the poor child that night, but bright dreams of a happy future. Know-

ing full well that on the morrow the whole world would be forced to acknowledge her lover's innocence.

CHAPTER XIV.

"LIKENED ALMOST UNTO THE PRODIGAL SON."

The morning following the exciting quest at the old mill Genevieve suffered a nervous breakdown and was forced to remain in her room for an indefinite period. For long months both mind and body had been taxed to the utmost and her physical condition was such that she could not stand the shock incident to the culmination of her long drawn-out vigil.

The father, however, was astir bright and early. He had become thoroughly convinced of the truthfulness of White-Eagle's statement and lost no time in circulating the news throughout the countryside. By noon an immense throng had congregated at the old mill, all bent on obtaining a first glimpse of the ghastly evidence. When the proper authorities arrived upon the scene, the box and skeleton were removed from their long-time hiding place and taken to St. Charles. A body of the leading citizens were selected to view the evidence and pass opinion as to the merits of the case. After the box had been opened and its contents thoroughly perused their deliberations were short. They brought in a verdict placing the blame where it

rightly belonged. The evidence was conclusive and bore out White-Eagle's statement to the letter.

Not one in the community but had accepted the finding of the body of jurors as final, and all retired to their homes fully satisfied that the mystery had at last been cleared, but there was a great many of the men folk especially, whose slumbers were interrupted that night by visions of a period of darkness dating back to a time a little more than two years ago, when they had gathered at the settlement to mete out punishment to one whom they now knew to be absolutely innocent. Their guilty souls would not adhere to their earnest desire to forget all, and throughout the long weary night, and for many long days thereafter no doubt, their consciences were sorely pricked by memories of the past. But they were those good honest souls and all, without a single exception, were willing to ask forgiveness from the family which they had so greatly wronged. To this end a day was appointed that every one in the community who had participated in the attempted lynching, or had said the least word derogative of Irving Brant's character, might visit the old homestead and humbly ask the forgiveness of the gray-haired father and invalid mother, who had so nobly clung to the belief in their son's innocence.

The day appointed was one long to be remembered. The good people had been notified of the intended visit and the captain had made arrangements as best he could for the accommodation of the visitors. Old Aunt Chlo had been pressed into service and was on the spot bright and early "to

receive de company fo' Missa' Matilda," as she was pleased to term it. The sun was hardly an hour high when the first wagon hove in sight. The Rosses were first, then the Christys, followed by almost a continuous string up to nearly noon, when the Brant home was filled almost to overflowing with young and old. All had brought well filled baskets and at the noon hour repaired to the inviting blue grass lawn underneath the giant shade trees surrounding the cottage, to partake of the glorious repast. Mrs. Brant had been provided with an easy chair and sat with her husband at the head of the spread, and though she strove diligently to appear light-hearted and gay, yet that careworn expression could but denote long hours of worry.

The blessing said, Eph Christy, who had been selected as the spokesman, slowly arose, and when the right hand was uplifted a deathlike silence fell upon the multitude. The hour had come when they were to openly acknowledge their sins in the presence of man. But quiet reigned for only a moment, then the spokesman began:

"We hev' come here to-day, everyone uv us, tu ask the fergiv'ness uv them that we feel we hev greatly wronged." "Everyone uv us has sed things that hadn't orter been sed, and some uv us hes done things that would make the acts uv the Devil look like a crippled ox in a mud hole. But we ain't afraid or ashamed tu go tu them as we hev wronged and ask their fergiv'ness. I was sure I seed Irving Brant comin' out uv the Sampson house on the night uv that awful murder, but it must hev' bin one o' them ere 'lucinations. I wuz

mistaken, and all uv you hev bin mistaken in what you hev sed an' done since. The poor wronged boy is not here to listen to what we hev tu say, but we kin arise to our feet, and with bowed and penitent heads, ask the fergiv'ness of the dear old father and mother who hes suffered so much these long years through our unworthy actions."

When he had finished speaking the crowd arose to their feet immediately, and with bowed heads humbly asked the forgiveness of those whom they had so greatly wronged.

After the very last one had finished speaking there was a long silence. A strange scene was being enacted underneath the overhanging branches of the giant shade trees in the front yard of the old farm home. Tears were streaming down the pale face of Matilda Brant, and the Captain sat as if glued to the spot. After awhile he arose to his feet and in a cool, steady voice, related the story of the Prodigal Son. "You are not exactly as the Prodigal Son," he said, "but have unwittingly been led astray." Mother and I have known all along that our boy was innocent, and have never harbored any ill will for the part you good people have taken in the affair. We are more than glad to still number you as our friends. If you have said or done anything that would merit forgiveness, I wish to assure you that it is readily granted in so far as we are concerned. I sincerely trust, however, that this may be an object lesson to all of us and that in future we may show the utmost consideration for the welfare of others and have a strict care for the things that are not our own."

His kindly words had brought tears to the eyes of nearly all present and the entire assemblage stood in mute silence. After a short pause the Captain continued, "We have not been altogether alone in the belief of our boy's innocence. There is another, an angel, God bless her, who was not only instrumental in saving our boy from the clutches of that fanatical mob, but has succeeded in ferreting out the mystery surrounding the whole affair, and placed the blame upon the shoulders of them to whom it rightfully belonged. I presume you are all aware of the identity of the person of whom I am speaking? Genevieve Pierron." "Genevieve Pierron," came from almost every throat simultaneously. "Yes, it was her ready wit and resources that put into execution the plan for the escape. We hardly know ourselves to this day how it was accomplished."

Then pandemonium broke loose. The entire crowd, a great many of whom had participated in the attempted jail raid, were for hearing the story direct from the lips of the daring girl. Cries of "Where is she?" "Where is she?" "Bring her here," and many like expressions rent the air. When quiet was finally restored a committee was selected and hurriedly dispatched to the Pierron home to bring Genevieve, but the poor girl who had all along refrained from notoriety as much as possible, refused absolutely to open her little book of secrets to the world, and no amount of persuasion could induce her to change her mind until thoroughly convinced that Irving's parents were anxiously awaiting her coming. Then she yielded and

consented to go, although rather reluctantly, for she was still in a very delicate condition, not having fully recovered from the shock incident to the tour of investigation at the old mill.

The little party were met at the front gate of the Brant home by the excited throng and Genevieve was carried on the shoulders of the female contingent to the side of Mrs. Brant, where a comfortable seat had been provided. The eager rabble had grown so impatient and restless that they could hardly await the telling of the story. But Genevieve was the same nerry being as of yore, and patiently waited until she had ample time to get herself together before starting on the long recital. "I hope you all understand that my nerves have recently been subjected to a very severe strain," she said, in way of quelling their eagerness as much as possible, "and I trust the pardon I ask for the short delay will be very readily granted." Her few words had the desired effect and their eagerness abated to a wonderful degree.

When quiet was at last fully restored Genevieve proceeded at once with the narration, which for the throng of listeners was exciting from start to finish. She began at the very first, relating in a modest and very minute manner the incidents leading up to the time of the escape. She told of the persuasion necessary to get Irving's consent to the plan, and of the manner in which the daring deed had been so successfully accomplished. The climax being reached when that part of the story relating to the manner in which she had so easily duped the guards and members of the mob was told. The entire

crowd stood with mouths wide open ready to grasp every sentence. There were some among them who had been eye-witnesses to the deceptive ordeal on that dreadful night, and while they were now more than glad that the attempt at mob violence had been a failure, yet they were awed beyond measure at having been made the scapegoats of the young girl's shrewd, sagacious cunning, but their admiration for her almost supernatural nerve precluded any possibility of an unkind feeling toward her. Amidst the lusty shouts of the younger contingent she was most graciously crowned Queen of the day, every one entering into the beautiful ordeal with a vim that could but denote the one fact, their kindly words and actions truly emanated from the heart.

When all was quiet once more Genevieve proceeded with her story.

"I sincerely appreciate the hearty manner in which the little story has been received thus far," she said, "but there is another who lent much valuable assistance and is entitled to, at least a portion of the credit. For many long weeks after the escape our hero found shelter and safety in the rudely constructed home of Auntie Chlo, whose old colored hands, God bless them, worked unceasingly to make him comfortable." At this moment for some cause the old lady appeared upon the scene, and without further ado the excited crowd, who were again worked to the highest pitch, gathered the old woman upon their shoulders and jostled her about as if she were a chip.

When she was again permitted to set foot upon terra firma it is needless to say that she was very badly excited. She could not possibly conceive of any reason for this apparently uncalled-for proceeding.

When she had sufficiently recovered from the severe shaking to talk, she rolled her eyes in that mysterious colored individual manner and proceeded to inquire:

"What's de mattah? What am all yo' foolish folks tryin' to do with dis poo' ole niggah?"

Then some one endeavored to make her acquainted with the cause of the excitement.

"De're you is. I jest 'lowed yo' aint nevah g'wine to hab any sense. Fust yo' tries to mudah dat poor boy, now youse tryin' to kill dis poor ole niggah woman."

"No, no," chimed in Mrs. Brant. "You do not understand, Aunt Chlo. These good people are endeavoring to show their appreciation for the kindness you have shown our boy."

"O dat's it, am it! Well, I jest likes to hab some-thin' else 'sides dat 'preciation, or whateber yo' calls it, 'cause I doant like de way it's handed out."

When the old colored "mammy" at last became reconciled to the rough treatment she had received, she was easily persuaded to tell her part of the story, which was entered into with an earnestness and vim that surprised everybody. None had ever suspected her of having had any hand in the affair, and these were no doubt the first words to escape her faithful lips with reference to the matter in the

presence of any human being, with the possible exception of Genevieve, who had from the very beginning been her only confidant.

When all had been told Genevieve asked one last favor of the party.

"We have succeeded in establishing Irving Brant's innocence," she said, "but he has not yet been returned to the faithful ones whose hearts have ached so long for his welfare, nor has his good name and just heritage been restored. To this end I humbly implore you to lend every assistance in your power in ascertaining his present location. If he be alive let us return him safely, and with all honor to the parental hearthstone. If dead, we may have the blessed privilege of showing to the world the unblemished record of him whose earlier career was above reproach, and whose good name will no doubt stand out boldly emblazoned upon the great scroll of Heaven, as one who has suffered almost endless remorse and humiliation through the wrongful and cruel imagination of an ever restless sea of humanity." The strong feminine appeal at once had the desired effect and not one in the audience but voiced their willingness to lend every assistance possible in getting the glad good news to Irving.

As the afternoon began to wane the party started making preparations for their departure, their actions being attended by the usual rustle and bustle. Before disbanding, the good folk, one at a time, bade Johnson and Matilda Brant a pleasant good-bye, assuring them of their intention to do everything in their power to bring about the speedy re-

union of the unfortunate family. When Lemuel Scroggins came forward, to the surprise of everybody, he carried his conversation far beyond the limits of an ordinary farewell greeting, surpassing anything in the nature of a speech which he had at any time previous been known to make.

"Well, friends," he began, "As I comes to bid you good-bye, I allow as how I kinder orter tell you 'bout something thet has bin worryin' me all day. I hain't superstitious, nor does I b'lieve in ghosts, but me and Mandy wuz sure we seed thet boy at the Sampsons on the night they wuz murdered. Now, I don't care one whit what the rest uv you think, I hev come to the conclusion that it wuz his ghost or the Devil hisself workin' some uv his deceptive tricks on us. But me and Mandy 'lowed as how we hain't goin' to be fooled eny more by them deceptive antics of either man or the 'Old Harry' himself. 'Cause we done found out 'The more we sees the less we knows, and the less we tells the more friends we got.' Hain't thet 'bout right Mandy?"

And the good wife, who had been a very attentive listener, chimed in with an eager response:

"You bet it is, Lemuel."

All had become eager listeners to those few remarks and their eyes were closely riveted upon the principal characters in the peculiar little drama. They had become so deeply interested in the droll sayings that they had not noticed the approach of a new-comer, who had very stealthily slipped up behind them, evidently bent on giving them some kind of a surprise.

Lemuel had barely closed his talk with the assertion that he and Mandy could "die happy if they only knew whether the strange being they had witnessed was Ghost or Devil," when a strange musical voice from somewhere in the rear fell upon their ears.

"Then your wish shall be granted," it said, "For I have come to bear witness to the identity of the individual to whom you refer. The apparition of which you speak was none other than Irving Brant's twin brother, Ivan. He was absolutely innocent of any wrong-doing in the matter, and his actions on that dreadful night will be explained to the entire satisfaction of all in due time."

CHAPTER XV.

"DOES IT NOT SEEM STRANGE, MY DEAR, GOOD
MOTHER."

The Keys family had all along remained neutral, retaining the sincere friendship of the family of the accused as well as the good will and esteem of the accusers. When the day was set apart for the little affair at the Brant home, they, of course, received an urgent invitation, but were not called upon to participate in the wholesale request for forgiveness. They were very prominent, however, in the entertainment of all concerned, and were the very last to begin making preparations for their departure.

Cecelia Keys, although reluctantly detained, had never found time to visit the old home for one single time since the day of her departure for the East. She had taken up her chosen profession, and almost every moment of her time had been occupied with the care of those unfortunates who had been stricken with some loathsome malady, or the victim of some serious accident mayhap. For weeks at a time the letters would come quite regularly, then for months perhaps, not a single word to cheer the ever patient soul of the faithful mother. But these long delays were always satisfactorily accounted

for. Her vocation would sometimes necessitate the going into strict quarantine for an indefinite period of time in order that the patient might receive the most tender attention, and others be thereby shielded from coming in contact with the epidemic. Under these circumstances, a letter would not be received in the mails for transportation.

At the time of the fiesta at the Brant home, Mrs. Keys had not heard from her daughter for many long weeks, and had almost begun to despair of ever receiving another communication. Her mind was fully absorbed with thoughts of the absent one at the very moment that Lemuel Scroggins had delivered his masterful speech, and when the strange voice had spoken from out the little circle, was the very first on her feet to welcome the newcomer. The memories of that musical voice were at that very moment being diffused through her soul.

The new-comer, who had arrived so unexpectedly upon the scene was none other than Cecelia Keys, the first visit to the scenes of her childhood since the day of her departure. The dear old mother, with the memories of Cecelia's parting words yet tingling in her ears, grasped her daughter to her breast and wept tears of joy. Since childhood she had been a favorite in the community, and the good folks were all glad to again clasp her hand in a hearty handshake and welcome her back to their midst most graciously. She was at once besieged with questions regarding herself, a few being so overzealous that they made bold to inquire as to the whereabouts of Ivan Brant, but she stoutly refused to enter into any further conversation re-

lative to herself or anybody else, and in order to rid herself of so many inquisitive beings, hurriedly clambered into the old farm wagon and bade the driver hasten to the old home, the dearest spot on earth.

Once within the privacy of her own room, peace and quiet reigned supreme, the first rest she had enjoyed for many a long day.

Far away from the maddening throng and the city's glare, she gently whispered in her mother's ear the story of her long experience as a custodian of the physical welfare of others.

"At times, dear mother," she explained, "we encounter ordeals which are calculated to rack the nerves of the strongest, and wring pangs of sorrow from the hearts of the most hardy, and we feel that we are bound to give in, yet there is a fascination about the whole affair that seems to be drawing us on, and on, I cannot attempt to explain the reason, unless it be the knowledge that we are doing our duty toward our fellow-man. A plain duty which God intended we should perform.

"Yes, I have witnessed many trying situations, and have been made the recipient, many, many times, of the everlasting gratitude of some poor soul whom I had endeavored to care for in the kindest manner, and though my strength and energy have very often been sorely tried, yet, thank God, I have never faltered in my duty. To-day we are perhaps called upon to watch by the bedside of some hardened criminal, whose hours are numbered, and whose last breath perhaps, is a curse against his Maker. He evidently has no conception or knowl-

edge of the many promises of the world to come, dying as he had lived. Our hearts go out in sympathy for the poor lost wretch, and we gather around his cot in mute silence, only murmuring, 'Too late, too late.'

"On the morrow the scene changes, and we watch and pray by the little cot of some sweet innocent child as the last breath fades away, and the precious soul is gently wafted back to the God who gave it. Tears moisten the eyes and we feel that it is too bad that the little rosebud has been plucked thus early in life. Yet there is a sweet consolation in knowing that all the earthly trials and tribulations are ended, and the spirit has traveled to that beautiful land of sunshine.

"Thus, almost daily, we are being brought in contact with the many different phases of life, and while we become, in a way, hardened to the situation, yet our object in life cannot be altogether mercenary, and our nature bids us have at least some consideration for the welfare of others."

For a moment not a word was spoken. Then the kindly mother spoke from out the depths of her heart:

"How well you have spoken, Cecelia, dear. Your long absence has been the source of a great amount of worry on your dear old mother's part, yet I cannot censure you. No, it is my duty to praise your noble efforts. May God bless you, my child, you have done exceedingly well."

"But, mother, I have only told you of my work among strangers. Now I am going to tell you of

my own good fortune, and what good I have accomplished for those who are near and dear."

"Then your work has not been altogether with strangers?"

"No. I have met and conversed with Ivan Brant. And under the most peculiar circumstances. If you care to listen, I will tell you all."

"Go on, my dear child. If it is a pleasure for you to tell, I can assure you it will be a pleasure for me to listen."

Then the story began.

"I had been in the city only a short time when I noticed the papers, and the most prominent periodicals, too, were loudly lauding the efforts of a certain minister of the Gospel, who had for some time been participating in a very enthusiastic revival which was being conducted in a very prominent part of the city. Imagine my surprise when I discovered this noted ecclesiast to be Ivan Brant. However, from the very moment the discovery was made I could not put away an irresistible desire to attend the meetings. I battled hard with self, but was a hopeless loser. That Infinite something kept nagging at my heart until I fully made up my mind to go; just once, mind you. When evening came I wrapped a heavy veil about my face and occupied a seat in the vast audience. I sat throughout the entire meeting as if spell-bound, as did hundreds of others who were attracted by the personal magnetism of the wonderful exhorter. The meeting over, I went directly home, but no matter how hard I tried, I could not erase that familiar countenance

from my mind. Sleep was an absurdity, so I sat the whole night through thinking of him, and the—the short, sweet days of childhood.

“When evening came again that irresistible force came knocking so strongly at the door of my heart that I could not resist the temptation to go, at least just once more. So that evening and many others thereafter found me occupying a very prominent seat in the audience, but always veiled so there could be no possible chance of a passing recognition. But that last night, oh, my dear, sweet mother, I shall never forget. Ivan had evidently become interested in my identity, and as soon as the meeting was over came directly toward me. He came quite close, oh, so close that I could easily feel his warm, passionate breath upon my cheek as I had known it in days gone by upon the banks of yonder running stream. My heart went pit-a-pat and I felt that I would be compelled to disclose my identity. But, no, that would never do. I hastily pulled myself together and had no trouble in passing myself off for a working girl of the city. As soon as I could extricate myself from the babbling throng, I hurried out of the door and down the street as fast as my poor, tired limbs would carry me, stopping at the home of a very dear friend whom I had promised to visit earlier in the evening. As the evening was growing quite late and I yet had a good long walk before me, I did not tarry, but hastened on home. As I came close to the intersection of two of the city’s principal thoroughfares I was greatly surprised to see a pedestrian being run down by a reckless cab driver. The cabby paid no attention to what he

had done, and raced madly on, leaving the poor unfortunate lying prone upon the hard cobble stones. I hastened to his side, only to find him unconscious. I gently raised his head, then shrank back in alarm. 'My God,' I exclaimed aloud, 'It is—— yes, it is Ivan.' I brushed the matted hair back from the eyes while the bruised head rested gently in my lap, and mother, dear, you may censure me if you will, but I just couldn't resist the temptation to plant a kiss upon the pale, clammy brow. I was terribly wrought up over the affair, but pulled myself together sufficiently to at once realize my position. I dragged the body to the pavement and went at once on the hunt for assistance. When it arrived we were not long in ascertaining the extent of his injury, which was only slight. As soon as he regained consciousness I hurried along to my apartments, where I dreamed out the long, tiresome night.

"Shortly after the happening of this incident I was dispatched to a very remote and distant city to care for a quite elderly lady, and did not again hear of Ivan for many long days thereafter, although I did hear on the very day of my departure from the city, that his wife had passed away, but could not glean any of the attending circumstances.

"From this time on my time was fully occupied. Being sent from one place to another in such rapid succession that I had soon traversed almost the entire country. About two months ago I returned to the city, and was at once placed in charge of the main ward in the city hospital. My hours were from twelve o'clock midnight to twelve o'clock

noon. On the particular night of which I shall speak, there was very little doing. All the patients were resting easy and I had dozed off in my easy reclining chair, dreaming, dear mother, yes, I was actually, dreaming of him. How plain and lifelike everything seemed. We were holding converse in the same old way, but Ivan was sad and dejected and calmly informed me that he would prefer death to living out a miserable existence in this cold, pitiless world. 'Why, Ivan,' I exclaimed. But just at that moment the ambulance rattled up to the door and I was very rudely awakened from my reverie by the loud noise. I was, of course, a little bit nervous at being aroused in this manner, but calmed myself as best I could, and awaited results. The attendants soon came blundering in, bearing a silent form upon the stretcher, which they said was to be placed in one of the rooms under my care. I was informed that it was an attempt at suicide, and the body had at first been taken to the morgue for identification, but a spark of life yet existed and a short medical examination had revealed a very peculiar wound. The weapon with which the deed was committed had been held toward the head at an angle of perhaps forty-five degrees, the point of the weapon ranging upwards. Fortunately, the bullet had been deflected by the skull, only plowing a furrow underneath the cuticle, ranging very closely with the contour of the cranium and emerging at a point directly opposite the spot where it had entered. A very painful, though not necessarily a fatal wound.

"I paid but little attention at the time, but upon

my first visit to the room after the attendants had departed, I was greatly surprised to find my patient fully conscious, and I was surprised more than ever when I again found myself face to face with Ivan Brant."

"Does it not seem strange, my dear, good mother? Does it not seem that our lives have thus far been involuntarily linked together?"

"For a moment after the meeting I was almost stricken dumb, but when our eyes met again and those large, brown orbs looked deep into my soul, I was brought back again to the bygone days when our lives were so closely linked together, and that intimacy existed which I felt could never be severed. We were alone at last. I drew my chair close to his cot and caressingly stroked those dangling locks of hair from his eyes. 'Cecelia, dear,' he softly murmured, 'I have been lost. I have been led astray by the giddy world. I have never known the true meaning of life until again I have been permitted to look with a knowing heart and a sincere purpose, into the depths of your pure, faithful soul. For all these long months I have tried to forget you, but no matter where I have wandered, that dear sweet face has ever haunted me, and the pleasant days of our childhood were indelibly inscribed upon my memory. I thought all was lost. My money was exhausted and I was too proud to go to the old friends for assistance. Yes, I must tell you all. It was I, Cecelia, whom those good honest people discovered at the Sampson home on the night of that awful tragedy, but before God I am innocent of any wrong-doing other than being the pos-

essor of a weak, pitiless soul, which did not possess the manhood to tell all for fear of being suspected. When I left you on that dreadful night I was attracted by the bright light in the cottage and stopped to ascertain the cause, only to find those terribly mutilated bodies. My God, how can I ever forget it! How can I ever atone for the misery and disgrace I have brought upon my only brother, and I know him to be innocent! My God, what was I to do under the circumstances? I pondered and worried until my poor brain was in a whirl. I had grievously sinned and I felt that it would be better to end it all. Before I hardly realized what I was about, I grasped the weapon, leveled it at my head and fired. You know the result. But, Cecelia, darling, I feel that this incident has been a blessing. I feel that I now know the true meaning of life. My heart has undergone that repentance that emanates from the soul. My God, if I were only worthy to ask the forgiveness of the best and truest friend I have ever known, then I would be very happy.'

"'To whom do you refer, Ivan?' I ventured to ask.

"'Do you not know? Can you not understand?' he exclaimed in an excited tone of voice. 'It is you, you, the pure, sweet innocent girl whom I have so grossly wronged.'

"'Then, Ivan dear,' I heartily answered, 'You need have no fear, for you have long since been forgiven.'

Then he clasped me in his arms, dear mother, and for hours we lived the old life over. Those old love stories were told and retold until our very souls

became enraptured with their melody. We were reunited at last, and, oh, I am so happy."

"Perhaps, Cecelia, the repentance of which I spoke long months ago has at last made its mysterious appearance."

"I know so, mother, for after Ivan had been nursed back to health and vigor, he secured a very lucrative position at once and has promised to live the life of a man from this time on. Yes, I know at last that he has felt the keen pangs of sorrow."

Cecelia had come home to stay, but no amount of persuasion could induce her to breathe a word of the past to a living soul other than her mother. Ivan's parents were not even taken into her confidence.

She well knew that time would attend to the complete unraveling of the complex situation.

CHAPTER XVI.

“AND THE GREATEST OF THESE IS CHARITY.”

The quaint old city of New Orleans with her few feet above the level of the sea and peculiar form of architecture, likened almost unto grotesqueness, was just undergoing a siege of the Yellow Peril, the like of which had never before been known. Hundreds of her citizens had succumbed to the dread disease and countless numbers of heroes had been made in risking their very lives to assist and care for the stricken, exerting every effort to prevent the spread of the dread contagion. The whole city and surrounding parishes were under quarantine and a strict martial rule prevailed. Business was suspended indefinitely and traffic of every description was at a standstill. A great many of those who had rendered such valuable assistance in the beginning had finally succumbed to the dread monster, and the care of the sick was left entirely in the hands of the few who were immune. The streets were totally deserted, save by those who were so bravely risking all to do what they could to alleviate the suffering of the less fortunate, or the solemn tread of a grim pageant of death slowly wending its way toward the burial ground, where the almost count-

less number of new-made graves told the dreadful story of the city's misfortune. Homes which had once been happy were bowed in grief. The grim monster, Death, had perhaps entered therein and claimed some loved one for its own. In many instances whole families had been swept away by the ravaging clutches of disease. Homes which had once been the scenes of happiness and enjoyment were now totally deserted. Old gray-headed fathers and mothers had witnessed the last breath fade away from perhaps the flower of the household, hoping against hope that the precious soul might be spared and theirs taken instead; forced to gaze upon the inanimate form for the last time as it was loaded into the dead wagon and hurried away to the cemetery. Tearfully burying their dead out of their sight. Utterly powerless to resist the will of Him who doeth all things well.

For many weeks the carnival of death had run riot. The grim reaper had garnered a bountiful harvest. In the beginning a great many of the populace had feebly given up to weeping and wailing, but all had finally become reconciled to the inevitable, and their noble efforts to withstay the spread of the contagion were at last crowned with success. The veil of sorrow was slowly but surely being lifted and the city was coming into its own once again. The epidemic had been slowly checked until at the present time no traces of its deadly work were discernible, with the possible exception of a very few who were the last to contract the disease, and were now slowly recovering. The great metropolis was again taking on the airs of

frivolity, and business was resumed with an alacrity which soon developed into its normal state. Those careworn countenances had again taken on an expression of peace and contentment and the sorrows and cares of a few short weeks before were very readily forgotten.

Seated upon the veranda of a low, unpretentious looking building, his chair gently reclining against one of the huge columns supporting the tiled roof, a young man of rather prepossessing appearance, whose age could perhaps be placed at four and twenty, was gently humming a soft southern melody, his broad forehead and knowing look indicating to the casual passerby a wonderful amount of brains and intelligence. His emaciated form, however, bore the assuring evidence of his having been a victim of the recent epidemic.

Monsieur Pinchot, during his few short years in New Orleans, had accumulated a small fortune through his wonderful business sagacity, comparatively all of which had been given to the cause of humanity during the city's very recent unfortunate experience. He had not only given of his money freely, but had directed his personal efforts toward the care of those who were sick and in distress, the poorer classes especially coming in for the greater portion of his attention. He had not hesitated on visiting the most severe cases and very willingly ministered to their meager wants, until the poor unfortunate souls had almost come to regard him as an angel sent from Heaven, certainly a glowing tribute to his kindness and generosity.

But this condition of affairs could not exist al-

ways; his physical make-up had already been taxed beyond the power of human endurance, and the splendid specimen of physical manhood finally succumbed to the wily snares of the epidemic, the very last one to fall a victim to the loathsome disease. But Providence had also been generous to a degree, and his life had been spared. For weeks he had lain in a comatose condition, his very life hanging in the balance, supported only by the tiniest thread. But his time had not yet come and the great God who so kindly watches over all, willed that he live on.

At the present time he was rapidly convalescing and had been enjoying the comforts of the spacious veranda since early morning. But withal, time passed very slowly. The melody finally ceased, and the restless eyes were riveted upon the floor.

He had been captivated by the gods of meditation, dreaming out the future perhaps, or maybe of the past life which was as a myth to the many who knew him. His reticence had served as a barrier which practically made his past life absolutely secure from questioning or investigation. Yet the populace were glad to know him for his generous deeds and kindly ministrations in the hour of need, and were wont to speak of him in the most glowing terms, honestly giving all honor to whom honor was due.

His reverie was at length interrupted by loud cries coming from down the street. He glanced around just in time to see a familiar form hurriedly enter the pathway leading from the gate to the house. It was old Felix, the French body servant.

He was carrying a large bundle under one arm and with the other was gesticulating wildly, yelling almost at the top of his voice: "Monsieur, Monsieur!" At first Monsieur could not make out the cause of the undue excitement, and old Felix seemed filled with such a degree of ecstasy and delight that it was impossible for him to utter another word. He shortly recovered, however, sufficiently to explain the cause of the seemingly uncalled for hullabaloo. "Monsieur, Monsieur," he began, still in an excited tone of voice, "Ze papiers, ze papiers," and he produced the huge bundle from under his arm. "Zee what-you-call-eet? Ze quarantine have been raised, and we getta ze news from ze outside world, I believe as ze Americanos say."

"This is certainly good news, Felix, but no cause for such an excited state of mind. Calm yourself, man, calm yourself, and we will proceed at once to peruse the papers and ascertain if possible, what the old world has been doing since—— Well, what one might be pleased to term our lengthy incarceration."

He grasped the papers with an eagerness likened only unto that of the old servant, and lost no time in delving deep into the mysteries and harrowing events which they unfolded. Almost the first item upon which his eyes feasted was a glowing tribute to his own valor. There in bold flaring letters was a headline, the prelude to a quite lengthy article, reading as follows:

"Monsieur Pinchot a Hero."

"Gives his fortune and risks his very life in a noble effort to relieve the many unfortunates in the stricken city of New Orleans.

"No greed for gold to o'ershadow his plain duty toward his fellow-man, but a burning desire to extend a helping hand in the hour of trials and tribulations.

"Let him who so kindly ministers in the hour of need be decked with an everlasting crown of roses."

For a moment after finishing the article he sat as if spell-bound. A very perceptible glow overspread his countenance and the blood tingled in his veins. Since the beginning of the dread contagion which had prevailed for many weeks, he had hardly given a thought to self, but with the reading of that splendid eulogy, he at once began to realize the vast importance of his overt act.

But Monsieur was not vain, and the minute perusal of the article did little more than to arouse within himself a certain degree of admiration for the unselfish heroism he had displayed. "After all," he mused, "I have only done my duty toward God and my fellow-man. I am truly glad to know that I have done what I could. I fully realize that this expression of gratification is only for the time being, and that my name and earthly fame will soon be relegated to the past by an ever changeful humanity. But I am fully content to believe that the little act of beneficence which I have been permitted

to perform, will, for all time, be pleasing in the sight of Him who doeth all things well."

He read and re-read the article several times, then sat for a long time in a deep study. Old Felix had appropriated a goodly number of the papers and retired to the sanctity of his own private room, where he felt that he could peruse them more thoroughly without fear of molestation. He had grown quite interested in an article treating upon the destruction of the fever germ, when he was suddenly brought to his feet in alarm by a loud cry coming from the veranda. He dropped the paper and hastened to the spot from whence the sound emanated, only to find Monsieur lying in a dead swoon upon the floor. The old fellow was, of course, badly excited, but managed to lift the stricken body and carry it gently to Monsieur's private chamber, where, with the aid of a little cold water, he very rapidly brought about the process of resuscitation.

Felix could not possibly fathom the mystery as to the sudden and unexpected attack, but all the time felt that the reading of the papers might have something to do with the untimely affair.

However, when consciousness returned, Monsieur was not long in setting the old servant's mind at rest. "I am so happy, Felix," he explained, "I have not only the blessed privilege of knowing that the public in general have accepted my recent doings as an act of charity, but I have many, many other things to be thankful for." Then it was that Old Felix, in his own mind, attributed the cause of the collapse wholly to overjoy, and he was correct, too.

Monsieur in his weakened condition could not stand the severe strain, but the primary cause of the excessive joy was not as the old fellow suspected, as he afterwards learned.

For several days Monsieur kept within the privacy of his own room, no one being admitted except the servant, who carried the food and drink. The great joy which had come to him almost as a thunderbolt from a clear sky, served as a slight check to his rapid recovery, and he had elected to be alone in order that he might the more rapidly recuperate. But this willful seclusion was not for long. He came forth a few mornings after, looking brighter and fresher than at any time since the beginning of the very recent struggle between life and death.

"Well, Felix, old man, I am feeling just fine," he said. "There was a time when I had almost lost faith in all human beings, and lived in constant fear that the one great thing for which I longed in this life would never be forthcoming; but now my Star of Hope is decidedly in the ascendancy, and I feel that life is worth the living, no matter how rugged the pathway. My happiness might seem to you more excessive than did yours to me, but, Felix, old friend, I have great cause for happiness. Why, man, you cannot possibly have any conception of the great change that has been wrought in my life by the unearthing of that precious bundle of papers. Here, read this. And he produced from his inside pocket a crumpled page of the paper containing the article which had brought about the rapid change.

The old fellow took the sheet and looked at the

heading. It was a St. Louis paper, bearing date of some ten days prior to the present time. He glanced casually over the entire page before beginning on the article which had been pointed out as the theme of joy; the one great link in the chain of a human happiness. "Read it aloud," exclaimed Monsieur. "It is as the Balm of Gilead to my soul." The old fellow then began to read very slowly in his strange inarticulate way:

"Faithful to the Last."

"A prominent society belle spends some of the best years of her life in an attempt to fathom a deadly mystery which had sent her sweetheart adrift in the world.

"With the aid of her ever-faithful mother she worked silently on the case until her efforts were finally crowned with success.

"Through her untiring vigilance the real culprits have been apprehended and her lover's innocence fully established. But thus far no trace of the whereabouts of the innocent victim can be found."

When the old servant had completed reading the entire article he glanced into Monsieur's open countenance, only to discover an abundance of tears moistening those soft, mellow eyes.

For awhile silence reigned supreme, then Monsieur spoke. "Felix, do you not think it was a glorious finale to that splendid young lady's unswerving fidelity?"

"Wee, wee, Monsieur, zat 'ees ze one sad story.

Zat young lady 'ees ze, what you call 'eet, ze one great hero. I can no see why ze lover can no be find."

"But, Felix, there is a reason for all things. Suppose, for instance, that he has wandered away and died, perhaps in a foreign land, among rank strangers. Under the circumstances he could not possibly have disclosed his identity, and if this has been his unfortunate fate, his body, no doubt, now lies buried in a potter's field somewhere in this wide, wide world, with not the least semblance of a headstone to mark his last resting place; only a little mound of soft, moist earth, one among many, harbingers of the coming resurrection, bearing only the assuring evidence, 'That man was born to die.'"

The old fellow was very perceptibly moved by Monsieur's sad recital of a possibility, and both sat for a long time in a deep study, the monotony only being interrupted by the ticking of the clock on the mantel, or the peculiar noises of insect life coming through the open window. The silence was finally broken by Monsieur.

"But, my dear old fellow, we have no assurance that such is the case. Let us always try to look at the bright side of life, and while at the present, you have a great sorrow in your heart for the faithful one who has so bravely fought out the great battle of self-sacrifice in order to establish the innocence of the man she loved, let us be optimistic and lend our hopes and prayers that the young man may yet be restored to his sweetheart and home.

"Zat 'ees right Monsieur. Zat 'ees right. I shall

pray to ze ver' great God above zat hees life be spared, and zat he return safe to ze sweetheart."

"My dear good friend, you can never know how I appreciate the interest you have manifested in the young lady's welfare, and I am pleased to advise that you have only to pray for a safe voyage and continued good health, for, thanks to the goodness of an allwise Providence, I am personally aware that the young man's life has been spared thus far."

"Zen you know heem, Monsieur? And you know zat he 'ees alive?"

"Yes, Felix. I am he. The name of Pinchot is an alias. My correct name is Irving Brant, and I sincerely trust, one that from henceforth I will not be ashamed to acknowledge before God or man. I have all necessary arrangements made for the start North in the morning, and what little of my fortune that has been saved from the wreck of disease, I shall leave to the noble friend who has stayed by me through it all. You, Felix, are the one. This is all I can do to show my humble appreciation of your kindness."

The old fellow broke down and cried as if his poor heart were breaking. "But, Monsieur," he exclaimed through the tears, "I can no deceive you. Zar 'ees another zat show ze ver' great kindness when you so ver' seek zat you know nothing. For weeks zen a ver' pretty lady come and help to take ze ver' good care of you. Zen you begin' get better and she leave; but before she leave she say to me, zat she know you, but zat I must nevaire, nevaire tell. Zen she gone. Some say through ze,

what you call 'eet? ze quarantine and back to ze North."

"Ah, I understand it all now," exclaimed Monsieur. "For some time I have wondered who could have circulated that wonderful story of the city's condition. It must have been she who has furnished such a vivid description to the correspondents for the Northern papers. I thank you, Felix, for the information, but I cannot possibly conceive of her identity. My gift to you, however, remains the same, and you have my promise that if I can possibly discover her identity, her kindness shall not go unrewarded."

At the boat landing the next morning the old servant bade his master an affectionate farewell. As he clasped his hand for the last time, a flood of briny tears welled up in the soft blue eyes. "Monsieur," he exclaimed, "'eet nearly break ze old heart to see you go, but ze ver' great love I have for ze brave lady overcome 'eet all."

Irving stepped aboard the boat, and as the huge monster slowly plowed her way Northward, the briny tears of the old servant mingled with the waters of the Mississippi and were carried outward to the Atlantic, as our friends, sent adrift one by one upon the great ocean of life.

CHAPTER XVII.

"THE WANDERER'S RETURN."

By slow stages Irving Brant made his way up the Mississippi. Time hung heavily on his hands, but his industrious nature would not permit of idleness, and he very readily entered into the duties connected with the manning of the boat with a vim that brought smiles to the grim visages of even the oldest rivermen. They were not at all used to this sort of doings, as one of them good-naturedly explained, but they were greatly amused at the awkward work of the "greener" and very much pleased to have some one to help them with the arduous work. They kept Irving busy most of the time, a fact for which he was quite thankful, as work was the only thing which would to any great extent relieve the feeling of anxiety relative to the end of the journey.

He could not help wondering how he would find everybody and everything at the old home, the home which he had been so reluctantly forced to leave only a few years before.

"I wonder if there has been any very perceptible change in the old familiar places and faces? and Ivan, I do hope he has made good in the ministry."

He never for a moment thought other than he would be received with open arms by his parents, but could not figure out just how he would be looked upon by the public in general. Thus he would muse for hours at a time, his mind so absorbed with the matter that he would become utterly oblivious to all around. His thoughts would fly rapidly from one scene to another until, finally, centered upon the object of his adoration, Genevieve Pierron, where he would almost invariably find himself when awakened from his reverie.

Day after day as the boat plowed its way up the river and Irving drew nearer and nearer his destination, he became more restless. From morning until night, when not engaged in helping others, he would pace the deck from one end of the boat to the other. The one continuous change of scenery marking the shore line on either side of the river, which under ordinary circumstances would be a pleasure to look upon, became a bore. There was only one spot in the wide, wide world which he cared to look upon, but it did seem that he was living countless numbers of ages in the endeavor to reach that favored place. His nerves were strung to the highest tension and he was becoming quite irritable. He was continually after the Captain for greater speed, until that "hearty" became bored almost beyond the power of endurance, and in no uncertain terms, bade him to at once desist from any further annoyance. He had worked himself up to such a pitch that in his present weakened condition it was almost a miracle that he escaped a serious nervous collapse. But he kept on his feet, and

as the end of the journey drew near, became calmer and stronger.

All who have traveled are aware of the fact that under the most favorable circumstances, the most cheerful part of the journey is the home-coming. Imagine then if you please, what a great wave of anxiety must come over one returning under the peculiar circumstances which had confronted Irving Brant. Could we for a moment censure him for his weakness in this particular matter? If a weakness we may call it. Would it not be better to eulogize his action? for "He that hath no heart for home certainly hath not the proper knowledge of understanding."

As the great round sun was slowly disappearing behind the rugged hills lying to the west of St. Charles, the little craft which had carried Irving Brant from St. Louis, tied up at the rudely constructed landing. After much scraping and twisting the gang-plank was hauled in and he was the first of the passengers to set foot upon terra firma. All of the anxiety which had followed him on the long journey quickly disappeared, and he began to feel that bewildering sensation which comes with the knowledge of at last reaching the goal. He looked at the little band of people lining the shore, but did not discover a single face that he could remember. He then turned and walked slowly up the hill as one not seeming to have any particular object in life other than dispensing with time.

Once upon the main street of the sleepy village he began to feel perfectly at home. The architecture had not undergone any very radical changes;

the buildings looking almost the same as when he had last seen them. On the hillside sat the little log cabin of Daniel Boone, while in the background a few blocks distant the old jail structure, from whose iron-barred doors he had so hastily made his exit a few years before, sat low and squalid, looking ghostlike and somber in the evening's dull glow.

The same old puncheon with its roughly hewed wooden legs served as a resting place for the loungers in front of the corner grocery, although it had been carved almost out of the least semblance of shape by the keen blades of the army of inveterate whittlers who were wont to congregate at this favored spot.

For a few moments he rested upon its inviting bosom, then strolled on down the street until he emerged upon the main traveled road leading to the old farm home. He met with several of the old-time acquaintances, but they did not recognize him, and he passed quietly on. When he came to the little bridge spanning the stream on the outskirts of the village he looked all around for the thick chaparral which had so effectually concealed Genevieve's pony on the night of the escape, but it had long since disappeared, and in its place a field of yellow grain waving billowy-like in the twilight, bore evidence of the activity of the ax of the pioneer during his enforced absence.

Ere he had traveled a fourth of the distance night overtook him, but he strolled leisurely on along the dusty road, pausing now and then to peer through the darkness upon the huge shadowy form of some familiar farmhouse plainly silhouetted

against the clear evening sky and hemmed in by the blinking stars, the ghost-like appearance of the scene being broken only by the candle light's gleam penetrating the semi-darkness through the open window.

As the hour was nearing midnight he came to Aunt Chlo's little cabin and paused in the roadway to look upon the familiar scenes. By this time the full moon was shining high in the heavens and he was enabled to make out the surroundings for some distance. He could not detect any changes, the little patch of garden and the old rickety fences and buildings looking just the same as when he had found a welcome shelter underneath the weatherbeaten roof. "Truly a shelter in the time of storm." For some time he silently gazed upon the scene. "I wonder if the dear old colored 'Mammy' still occupies the premises," he mused. Then, as if at once becoming fully determined, he entered the gate and walked briskly up the gravel path leading to the doorway. As he drew near the building he was enabled to discern a faint gleam of light coming from a small rent in the improvised curtain covering the window. He paused for a moment and listened, but all was as still as death. He then advanced and rapped gently upon the door. At first there was no response, but when the rapping was repeated a faint voice from within bade him enter. He waited only a moment then gently raised the latch and stepped softly across the door-sill. The candle was burning low, yet he could plainly distinguish every object the little room contained. Aunt Chlo was bundled up in the bed, seemingly half asleep. It

was evidently she who had answered his repeated knocking. Sitting in the old arm chair, her feet resting upon the floor in front of the fireplace, the head gently reclining upon the fore arm, Irving at once recognized the familiar form of his sweetheart, fast asleep. At sight of the unexpected scene he stopped short, his limbs refused to act and he could proceed no further. For a moment all was silent, then Aunt Chlo recognized Irving and gave vent to her feelings by sitting straight in the bed and yelling at the top of her voice: "Bress de Lawd! Bress de good Lawd! De lost am found!" Genevieve jumped to her feet in alarm and hastened to the bedside. "What in the world is the matter, Auntie?" she asked. "What am de mattah? Law sakes alive can't you all see who'se heah?"

Irving had remained very quiet, a silent spectator to the entire proceedings, and Genevieve had not noticed the presence of a third person in the room. Upon being told by Aunt Chlo to "Look who'se heah," she casually glanced around, fully believing that the old lady had been the victim of an hallucination, and that they were the only occupants of the little room. When her eyes rested upon the statue-like form of Irving she was surprised beyond measure and could only stand and stare. At first glance she did not recognize him, but when those soft, mellow eyes looked deep into her soul she was quickly brought to a full understanding of the cause of Aunt Chlo's seemingly uncalled for excitement. "Irving!" was the only word she could utter. He advanced quickly and clasped the petite form in his arms, and with the pretty

head nestled upon his heaving bosom, reiterated the story told at the Mill Dam upon the night of his departure. "I loved you then, I love you now," he said. "Yea, my love has been increased ten thousand fold by a knowledge of the implicit faith you have seen fit to repose in one who has been so wrongfully accused, and it shall be my one great aim from henceforth, to make you happy." "I am oh, so happy, Irving," she softly murmured. Their lips met and they lingered in one long fond embrace.

For a long time the old lady remained a silent witness to the "Tootsie Wootsie" proceedings, not deigning to interfere with their unalloyed happiness for a single moment. She, too, was overjoyed at the young man's safe return, and to witness the renewal of their love plight.

Eventually, in a spirit of levity, she thought to awaken them to a knowledge of her presence in the room, addressing them in the harshest tone of voice she could command:

"Break 'way dar! Break 'way dar! Irving Brant, has yo' done fergot yo' poo' ole niggah mammy?"

In the renewal of their happiness they had forgotten everything else, but when interrupted by the old lady they did break away in earnest. Irving at once realized his mistake and hastened to correct the error. "No, no, Aunt Chlo," he exclaimed, "I could never forget the one who has been a faithful friend through life and so nobly assisted my little benefactress in the hour of trouble."

"Look heah, Honey Boy, I was only foolin'. I

jest knowed you'd nevah fergit dis ole black soul. I'se sho' glad to see you an' Miss Genevieve at dem love capers agin'. I'se gettin' pow'rful tired an' I'll jest lay down and try to sleep while you all's g'wine to go on makin' love."

She wrapped herself in the snow-white counterpane and was soon fast asleep, while the happy twain went on love-making and, incidentally, narrating the happenings of the time intervening since their last meeting.

Irving was at a loss to know why Genevieve was stopping for the night at Aunt Chlo's, and ventured the query as to why this should be?

"Auntie has been quite sick for the past two weeks," explained the girl, and your father and I have been alternating in the care of her through the night. But we are very thankful that she is much improved, and will no doubt be out in a few days."

"God bless you, little girl! Your walk through life may be attended with trials and tribulations, but you are perfecting yourself to reap a rich reward in the world to come."

"Yes, Irving, we all have our ups and downs I suppose, but it is not all bitter; there is usually a calm after the storm, you know. It is true that I have led a life of anxiety and misery for the past few years, but I have been amply repaid for it all to-night. When I am again permitted to look upon your dear, sweet face I cannot believe other than God is good, and want to thank Him in all sincerity for the many manifestations of goodness. But, sweetheart, tell me, why have you elected to return

to us before knowing what disposition has been made of that awful mystery?"

"My dear little girl, I had not thought to tell you before, but I am not altogether in the dark relative to the matter. Since my departure I have been living quietly in New Orleans, under an assumed name, I am ashamed to admit. I was a victim of the recent yellow fever epidemic, but thank God, my life was spared. While convalescing I chanced upon an article in a St. Louis paper giving a glowing account of your noble sacrifice, and stating further, that your untiring efforts had at last been crowned with success and your lover's innocence fully established. I did not read further, but immediately started making preparations for the journey North. It did seem that I would never reach my destination, little girl, but there is an end to all things, you know, and I landed at St. Charles late last evening safe and sound. Fate has been kind enough to throw me directly in the arms of the one for whom I have longed and waited. Now I have only to see my parents and my brother Ivan, then I shall be the happiest mortal on earth. How are they? I had neglected to ask."

"Your father seems to be in splendid health, but Mrs. Brant is in a more delicate condition than usual. She has, of course, worried a great deal about your trouble, but Ivan has brought the greatest sorrow upon her poor gray head."

"What! You do not mean to tell me that Ivan has failed in his profession?"

"Worse than that, I fear. At first he was a raging success, but fell by the wayside, and from the

meager accounts we have been able to receive, has reaped a miserable reward. Nobody knows anything about him unless it be Cecelia, and she has steadfastly refused to discuss the matter."

"My God, can this be true! I have felt all along that he would make good and bring a ray of sunshine to gladden the hearts of those dear old parents who have suffered so much through my misfortune."

Thus they talked throughout the remainder of the night, gray dawn creeping in upon them ere the half had been told.

Morning found Aunt Chlo much better, and she was up early, hobbling around. Irving's arrival seemed to have a bracing effect upon her nerves and from that moment her recovery was rapid.

As the great round sun peeped over the distant hills Irving and Genevieve walked arm in arm down the familiar path leading from the little cabin to the Brant homestead. At the yard gate Irving paused and looked all around. Everything looked the same as on that never-to-be-forgotten morning when the bailiff had led him away to prison. The birds were singing sweetly in the tree-tops as if to welcome the wanderer back, and the old farm dog lay cuddled up in a little knot on the velvety grass, silently watching them, and wagging his great bushy tail as if to say "You're welcome."

No other signs of life were visible, but ere they had advanced another step a soft, mellow voice floated upon the air, bearing to their ears the sweetest strains of music. For a moment they remained silent, enraptured with the melody. But Irving

could stand it no longer. Tears filled the young man's eyes, and as he uttered the one word "Mother," he clasped his sweetheart's hand and hastened on. Mrs. Brant was sitting in her easy chair upon the broad veranda enjoying the freshness of the beautiful summer morning, and had not noticed their approach until aroused by the sound of footsteps.

Time could not erase that familiar form from the dear old mother's heart, and as soon as she espied Irving her arms went out, and he knelt by her side and nestled his head upon the faithful breast as when a babe.

"Thank God!" exclaimed the happy mother. "Our little girl has at last brought you safely back home."

"Yes, mother, to the fairest spot on earth."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"A TRUE REFORMATION"

The reformation of Ivan Brant, although a long time coming, was at last complete. From the moment he had gone forth from the hospital, where the willing hands of Cecelia Keys had nursed him back to health and vigor, he strove diligently to live honest and upright. He was not long in securing a remunerative position, and soon gained the everlasting esteem of his employer by his strict attention to business.

He did not neglect the faithful one as he had done in the past, but penned her a missive almost daily that she might in a measure, be happy. He abhorred society, and did not care to even mingle with the folk of the middle classes, to which he now felt he rightly belonged. He passed them all up that he might have the long hours of the evenings entirely to himself, always retiring early to the privacy of his neatly furnished apartment, where the time was spent in letter writing, or poring over the pages of some book in which he had become deeply interested.

For a long time he had contemplated writing to the old folks at home, but had treated them so

shamefully that he could hardly find it in his sinful heart to advise them of his whereabouts until he was in a position to go to them and frankly ask their forgiveness without the thought of seeking aid. Ah, how little he knew of the conditions at home; how the poor mother's heart was constantly aching for his return; how in her nightly prayers she had asked God to care for her poor sinful boy; how the ever-indulgent father, handicapped as he was by the loss of an arm, had worked and toiled, endeavoring to accumulate a comfortable little fortune for his wandering boys. He had not for a moment faltered in the belief that Irving's innocence would eventually be fully established, and that Ivan would return, as the Prodigal, after the whirlwind had been reaped.

The Captain was himself a man of the world and well versed in human natures and desires, hence the positiveness in basing his conclusions relative to his own flesh and blood. The correctness of his belief in so far as Irving was concerned had already been established, but they could not glean any idea as to Ivan's present location. The loving parents were, however, living in hopes of his speedy return, and awaited the time with patience when they could welcome their wayward boy back to the cheerful shelter of the parental domicile.

It was only a few blocks from Ivan's work to the lodging house, and from the time he had accepted the position, he had not once deviated from the course of the now familiar street leading between. The great city which he had known so well in times gone by was fast becoming a stranger to him. He

tried very hard to banish the thoughts of his past life from his mind, but his efforts proved in vain. Yet he sought consolation in the belief that he had at last accomplished something or had been the means of making some poor souls happy during his short ministerial career.

Yes, there was so little comfort in the reflection of the past that he sought to eliminate those memories altogether and center his mind wholly upon things material; to think only of his labors and of those who were near and dear to him.

Never a week but he received a long letter from Cecelia, breathing words of comfort and consolation. She was keeping him in direct touch with the doings at home, although the anxious parents were kept in ignorance of the fact. When he received the communication advising of Irving's return, and of the grand reception accorded him by the old associates, his heart leaped for joy. He was so thankful that the great injustice which he had so willingly perpetrated was not to terminate seriously, and could not but feel that this one error was not so grievous after all, although he fully realized that he had not acted fair and just in doing as he had done, and was perfectly willing to atone for the wrongdoing by asking the forgiveness of those whom he had wronged.

For months he had been subjected to the most severe mental worry over the matter, and at last decided to write the long proposed letter.

To this end he selected an evening when his nerves were at their best, and penned a long letter to the old folks at home, explaining all, the latter

part of the epistle being an earnest supplication for forgiveness.

For many long days he awaited an answer, but it never came and he was fast losing all hope of ever again being permitted to look upon the scenes of childhood, or to know the redolent pleasure of the dear old mother's caress. He was at last confronted with the startling thought of being completely ostracized from the family circle and felt that he was utterly forsaken. Yet Cecelia's letter inspired within his heart a faint gleam of hope which put him to thinking. But no matter how much he mused the complex situation remained a puzzle. Why had he not received an answer to his letter, when the source from which he was deriving all the information from home was leading him to believe that all was well, and that the dear old parents were anxiously awaiting his return?

But all the wonder and worry would not bring the true facts to light, and he lived on and on sincerely hoping that some day would bring him more light upon the subject. He worked harder now than ever, fully determined to yet make his mark in the world. His ambition had arisen to the highest pinnacle, though he was slightly handicapped by the worry incident to the very unpleasant thought of being a man without a home.

He had fully established himself in the good graces of his employer, and a great many of the important duties connected with the office work were assigned to him.

Lately the business had been exceptionally heavy and it was not an infrequent occurrence for him to

labor far into the night straightening out some matter of importance.

On a certain Saturday afternoon he had, from some cause, been detained at the office a little later than usual and did not get out to dinner until a late hour. Emerging from the building in which the offices were located, he walked directly across the street and started hurriedly in the direction of his apartments, his hat pulled low on his forehead, deeply meditating as he walked. He had only proceeded a short distance when he was very rudely accosted by a well-dressed, though rather peculiar looking individual.

"Ah! ze Monsieur," he exclaimed in an excited tone of voice. "I am now ze one happiest man in ze great beeg world. I think I nevaire, nevaire see you again. I hav a ze ver' ver' good fortune since you go away. Ze old uncle he die in zat dear old France, and I get a ze feefty thousand franc, so here I find ze best friend I evaire' know. Oh, such good, what you call 'eet? ze good luck." And the stranger seemed so happy that he fairly danced with delight.

Ivan was perfectly amazed at what he supposed the impudence of the fellow. He had no recollection of ever having met him before and could only figure that he was either crazy or seriously mistaken. He began to censure the stranger in no uncertain terms for his rudeness. "I do not know you, sir," he said. "Nor do I have any idea why I should be accosted in this manner, unless it be for some base motive."

At this from Ivan Old Felix (for it was really

Irving's faithful body servant) dropped his head, and the pleased countenance which he had already noted, at once took on a woe-begone expression.

Then in a calm, gentle voice the old fellow began to address him:

"Do you forget-a ze old servant so qu'eck? I nevaire, nevaire think zat. When you so ver', ver' seek zat you know-a nothing zen I work so hard for you, and when you leave I pray to ze great God zat you get-a safely back to ze ver' brave lady who help you so much because she love you. And now ze Monsieur Pinchot, no, ze Monsieur Brant, forget eet all.

Tears actually came into the old fellow's eyes as he concluded the mild rebuke, and he buried his face in his hands.

For a moment Ivan stood without uttering a word. The truth had at last begun to dawn upon him.

"But, my dear, good sir," he exclaimed in a much milder tone of voice, "there is a possibility of a mistake being made in the identity. My name is Brant, Ivan Brant, but I have a twin brother whose name is Irving. The resemblance is so striking that you could hardly detect one from the other were you to see us together."

The Frenchman's eyes were slowly opened to the plausibility of Ivan's assertion, and he again assumed a pleasant air.

"Ah, ze Monsieur ees correct and I beg ze pardon. I suppose I find ze brother at ze old home, or maybe he already marry ze ver' grand lady zat find for heem ze, what you call eet? ze innocence."

Ivan had become greatly interested in the old fellow and insisted that he share his own apartments for the night, to which he readily consented. After eating a light lunch they sat far into the "wee small hours" of the morning, talking of the many things that were so interesting to both of them. Old Felix related the many harrowing experiences which had confronted Irving during his exile in New Orleans, going into everything with a detail that thoroughly convinced the listener of the truthfulness of every assertion, although his characteristic expressions were sometimes quite hard to comprehend.

In return for the information, Ivan opened his heart and frankly poured out his soul's sorrow into the willing ears of his new found friend, not omitting a single transgression. When all had been told he felt a great sense of relief. The burden had been lifted, and he felt that the pangs of remorse had been lightened to a great extent by having the blessed privilege of confiding in some one, even though he be almost a total stranger.

Time flew rapidly and they did not retire until quite late. Neither of them had been accustomed to such late hours and were hardly in bed before they were sound asleep.

They did not awaken the following morning until aroused by a loud rapping on the door. Ivan sat up in bed, rubbed his eyes, and directed the disturber, whoever it might be, to "Come in." The door slowly swung around and the smiling face of Tom Turner, Ivan's next door neighbor, appeared at the opening. "Morning, everybody," he good-naturedly exclaimed. "Didn't know you had company

or I wouldn't have disturbed you for the world."

"Oh, come on in, you are not intruding in the least," returned Ivan. Then he explained to the new-comer that the stranger was an old-time friend of his brother, and related the story of their accidental meeting upon the street the preceding evening.

Ever since Ivan had occupied the apartments he had relied wholly upon Tom to bring his mail, if any, from the Post Office on Sunday mornings, and this was Tom's mission in the room at the present time, but he became so deeply interested in the "conglomerated lingo" of the Frenchman that it took him but a short while to entirely forget his business.

For hours he sat and listened to the old fellow narrate his wonderful experiences during the dreadful epidemic that had scourged the great city of New Orleans, and of the reconstruction period immediately following in the wake of the storm of death. Neither he nor Ivan had ever heard the story from the lips of a survivor and they sat with mouths wide open, eagerly grasping every word of the sad story.

Felix at length grew tired and endeavored to direct their attention toward some other subject, thus breaking the spell that had held them so firmly the whole morning long.

Ivan and Felix had not tasted a morsel of food since the previous evening and as the noon hour approached their stomachs began to apprise them of their negligence.

"My friend," chimed in Ivan, addressing old Felix, "are you aware of the fact that we have not eaten a bite for eighteen hours? It is very peculiar that we should become so deeply interested as to entirely forget the necessity of nourishment, do you not think so?"

"Zat ees ver' strange zat ze stomach forget all when ze mind ees so busy," answered Felix.

At this juncture Tom broke into the conversation with an exclamation that brought them all to their feet.

"By jing!" he said, "I had nearly forgotten your mail, Ivan. I have one of those 'pink tea epistles' from your sweetheart, or at least I think it is, which might fill you to overflowing with love and entirely absolve you from the painful necessity of expending your good money for boarding house hash. However, I would advise you not to try living on love altogether, as I have been reliably informed that its nutritious properties are comparatively valueless," saying which he hauled over the letter with a hearty chuckle.

Ivan eagerly grasped the missive and glanced at the hand-writing on its face. He very readily perceived that it was not from Cecelia, or at least she had not placed the address on the envelope. For a moment he held the crumpled paper in his hand, seemingly afraid to open it. The rosy glow which had o'erspread his countenance while being jollied by Tom Turner relative to his sweetheart only a few moments before, quickly turned to an ashy paleness, and his lips began to quiver.

Seeing the predicament in which he was getting,

Tom hastily excused himself and left the room.

"So long, everybody!" he exclaimed as the door closed behind him. But no answer came from within. Ivan never heard him, and the old Frenchman had become so deeply interested in the change of expression on Ivan's face that he paid no attention to anything else.

After awhile Ivan drew his chair up to the writing desk and quietly went about perusing the missive, musing the while:

"Yes, this is certainly the letter for which I have waited so long. I am almost afraid to note the contents, but we can only hope that they are favorable." With his mind filled with many like thoughts he continued reading.

Felix remained very quiet, a much interested spectator. From what he had noticed of the young man's actions, he felt that the letter must be of vast importance, and did not wish to interfere with the perusal, though watching very closely every facial expression. As the reading continued the paleness vanished from Ivan's face, and in its place a glowing expression of satisfaction told very plainly to the single onlooker that the contents were entirely satisfactory.

When the reading was done Ivan turned to Felix, so elated that he could hardly speak.

"I have cause for great joy, Felix," he finally explained. "This letter is from my parents, the first in many days, imploring me to return to the old home. My brother Irving and the lady of whom you have been speaking so favorably, are to be mar-

ried soon, and have sent an urgent invitation to me. I have not been long in making up my mind. In fact it has been made up for a long time, but this is the first opportunity. I shall settle with my employer to-morrow morning and make all preparations to start on the most pleasant journey of my life ere the sun goes down to-morrow evening. And you——”

“What ees eet, Monsieur?”

“——are to accompany me. Are you agreed?”

“Zat ees ze ver’ short notice, Monsieur, but I go to ze end of ze world to meet ze old friend again.”

Ivan’s employer was loath to sever the very pleasant relationship with such a faithful employee, but under the circumstances could enter no protest, and bade Ivan good-bye, with the assurance that the old position would be awaiting him at any time he cared to return.

The following day as they were gliding swiftly Westward the actions of the young man brought to Felix’s mind memories of a day long since gone, when the almost exact counterpart of humanity had, from a similar cause, been overcome by excessive joy in the quaint old city at the mouth of the great “Father of Waters.”

CHAPTER XIX.

"REUNITED AT LAST."

In the early fall, just at the time when the summer sun had begun its mysterious work of painting the leaves a variegated scheme of yellow, brown and red, and the ground was one unbroken carpet of emerald hue, except where, here and there, the great landscape gardener of the universe had planted a flower of a tinge that took away the monotony of a continuous color scheme, Irving Brant led his childhood sweetheart to the altar, where the links in the great chain of human happiness were more closely cemented together by the good old father who had known them both since babyhood.

The affair was a glorious finale to the long siege of worry and trouble which both of them had so undeservedly endured, and the public in general had, under the circumstances, taken a more active interest in the welfare of the young people than is ordinarily the case.

The week preceding the marriage, Captain Brant had called Irving to a private interview, and placed the entire estate in his hands, with the request that as soon after the wedding as possible, he assume the active management.

Ivan upon his return had been received with

open arms by the entire household, with the possible exception of Aunt Chlo, who had long since taken a dislike for the wayward boy, and was not long in explaining all to their entire satisfaction. He found upon inquiry that the letter which had caused him so much worry, although properly mailed, had from some cause, never reached its destination, and the faithful parents were sorely grieved. As Cecelia had truthfully informed him, they had all along anxiously awaited his return.

Of course at Irving's wedding Ivan was selected as best man, and Cecelia Keys was the bridesmaid, while old Felix was one of the many interested spectators and good wishers.

The ceremony over, Irving hastened to make the old fellow acquainted with the little lady which he had all along proclaimed so "Ver' ver' grand."

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "Ze pleasure ees all mine. I am so much please to meet ze grand lady zat Monsieur praise so ver' highly, I know zat you both be ver' happy."

At this moment Cecelia came tripping up, only to meet with a great surprise. She had not before noticed the old Frenchman very closely, but when she heard that voice she stopped short in amazement. The old fellow espied her at the same moment, the first time he had been near enough to recognize the familiar profile.

The surprise was mutual and both parties stood silent, seemingly unable to articulate.

When Irving noticed the change in the situation he was not long in making inquiry relative to the cause of the coolness in the atmosphere.

Felix looked at Cecelia and Cecelia looked at Felix, an amused smile playing over each face, but neither spoke a word for a full minute. Then the young lady broke into a hearty laugh. "Well, Felix," she exclaimed, "I suppose we have been caught with the goods on us, and may as well confess the whole story," and the old fellow without further ado explained to the eager listeners, in his own peculiar way, how he and the pretty lady had so successfully nursed Irving through the long siege of yellow fever, although despairing almost daily of his life. How she had so mysteriously disappeared at the first signs of returning consciousness, leaving her real identity a profound mystery.

When the story was completed the only words that Irving could utter were: "God bless you, Cecelia," while Genevieve clasped the pretty form to her breast and showered kisses upon her.

When Irving at last gained his composure the entire family were called to his side, not even forgetting Aunt Chlo, and he related his dreadful experience in New Orleans, and the promise that he had made to Felix of granting a reward to the mysterious angel who had assisted them so much during his illness, if he should ever ascertain her identity, "And I want to thank God that I have found her.

"Ivan," he said, "you must fulfill those precious childhood vows within the month, and when you are married it is my desire that, as a just reward to yourself and your faithful wife, you are to assume part management of the Brant estate, which has already been placed solely in my care, and from henceforth, we will not only be the Brant Brothers

in flesh and blood, but shall so be known in the business world. And with our faithful wives we will form a quadruple alliance for the care of these precious old gray heads who have led a long life of worry through the many, many workings of evil which have attended the pathway of their offspring."

"No, Irving, they have suffered wholly through my unworthiness," exclaimed Ivan.

"Let the days of unworthiness and worry sink into the dead past, Ivan, and let us live only for the future."

At this moment Aunt Chlo, who had not spoken a word, reached far down into the pocket of her linsey gown and produced a neatly folded package, which she handed Ivan.

"Dar, boy," she exclaimed, "I spec's dat am de only thing which gibes you de blessed privilege of bein' heah to-day."

All was very quiet while Ivan unwrapped the package. When open they beheld only a small, white handkerchief, with Ivan's monogram neatly printed in the upper left-hand corner.

"I do not understand, Aunt Chlo," exclaimed the young man. "This is an old handkerchief of mine, but what has it to do with my welfare?"

"I jest found dat piece ob linen at de Sampson home de mornin' after de murdah, dat's what I means."

Then the act of the faithful old colored soul in secreting the tell-tale evidence began to dawn upon him in all its importance, though he was perfectly innocent of any connection with the dreadful affair.

He grasped the old black hand and thanked her again and again, the first time in his life he had treated her justly. He openly acknowledged what he knew of the awful murder, even going so far as to tell of the peculiar noises which he and Cecelia had heard at the old mill prior to the journey homeward on that awful night, and when he had completed he again grasped Aunt Chlo's hand and vowed eternal allegiance.

For many days thereafter not a cloud came to mar their clear sky of happiness, and they all gave thanks to Him who doeth all things well, that they were at last a reunited and happy family.

For many years after the good old Captain would wander with his little grandchildren down by the old mill dam and gaze upon the magnificent structure, which had been rebuilt by the energetic Brant Brothers. For long hours he would lounge upon the green, mossy banks of the idly flowing stream, underneath the inviting shade trees, and amuse the little fellows grouped around him by relating the many legends connected with the early history of the surrounding premises, or by telling them the story of the empty sleeve which dangled at his side. Or mayhap, to dream of the precious one who had but recently gone on before, while the precious bits of innocent clay plucked flowers for dear old Grandpa and scampered about through the wildwood.

THE END.

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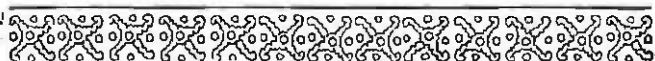
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